SERMONS

PREACH'D UPON

Several Occasions.

BY

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Chaplain in Ordinary to his Majesty.

Never before Published.

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TO THE

MOST REVEREND

Father in GOD

THOMAS,

By Divine Providence,

Lord Arch-Biſhop of Canterbury, *Primate of all* England, *and Metropolitan, and One of the Lords of his Majeſty's moſt Honourable Privy Council.*

May it Pleaſe Your Grace,

THAT the few following Diſcourſes may have the Privilege of recommending themſelves to the World, by the Honour of your Grace's Protection. Of which how undeſerving ſoever the Quality of the Performance may be, yet the

Design, I assure my self, is every way worthy a Patron of your Grace's Goodness and Character. For this is purely to enforce a serious and active Application of Mind to those Practical Duties of Religion, wherein the very Life and true Excellence of Christianity consists. In order hereunto, I have endeavoured to remove some of those false Pretences, whereby Men either suffer themselves to be diverted from the most necessary and useful parts of Religion, or are supported in a Wicked Course, or are apt to be discouraged in a Good One. And I hope, these Matters are (I am sure I intended they should be) stated in perfect Agreement with the Sense of that Church, which Your Grace, while in an inferiour Station, did adorn with so conspicuous a Piety, Vigilance, and

every

every Paſtoral Vertue; and whereof the Good Providence of God hath now ſo deſervedly advanced You to be the Common Spiritual Father.

But, Beſides the Right Your Grace hath to the Work it ſelf, You have alſo a very particular one to the Author, Whoſe Labours have been all along favoured with your Countenance and Encouragement; and Who ever ſince your Promotion to the Epiſcopal Order, hath had the Happineſs to live under Your Grace's Inſpection, formerly in Your Dioceſan, and now in Your Metropolitical Capacity.

Theſe, my Lord, are ſufficient Inducements for my offering this Tribute of Gratitude and Filial Obedience: and will not ſuffer me to doubt the favorable Acceptance of a Publick Acknowledgment, upon

so many Accounts your Due. In which I shall detain Your Grace no longer, than while I beg you to believe, that I esteem my self in a peculiar manner obliged (not only by my hearty Prayers to Almighty God, for his constant Blessing and extraordinary Assistance upon all Your Grace's Designs for the Good of his Church committed to your Charge, but) by every Instance of Reverence and Duty in my Power, to approve my self,

My LORD,

Your Grace's most Obedient Son and Servant,

Geo. Stanhope.

THE

PREFACE.

MY Reader had been ſpared the Trouble of a Preface, were it not that I think he may receive ſome Advantage towards profiting by the following Sermons, from having a ſhort Scheme laid before him of my general Deſign, and of that Dependence which theſe Diſcourſes, though compoſed at ſeveral times and upon very different Occaſions, yet, as now connected in one Volume, have upon each other.

The End I propoſed to my ſelf was the the perſwading Men to the diligent and conſtant Practice of Religion, by endeavouring to draw them off from ſuch Courſes and Opinions as ſeem more eſpecially to obſtruct or diſcourage it. And therefore the First Step I make is to ſhew the Neceſſity and Uſefulneſs of attending to Serm. I.

the plain Preceptive Parts of the Scripture, in Oppoſition to that wrangling and ſpeculative Humour, ſo predominant in this Age; As if the Perfection of a Wiſe and Good Man were to be placed only in exalted Notions, deep Enquiries, and skill in dark and contraverted Points. Which indeed are ſo far from making the generality of thoſe who attend to them the better, that, one would almoſt be tempted to think by the modern way of managing theſe Matters, they ſcarce leave them the Spirit of Chriſtians. Hence I pro-

Serm. II. *ceed in the* Second *Sermon to explain the Meaſures of that Purity, which the Goſpel requires in the Converſation of every one who would abandon a wicked Courſe in good earneſt. For an Encouragement to which difficult Undertaking,*

Serm. III. *my* Third *treats of the Juſtice and Mercy of God, in diſtributing the Advantages of the Evangelical Diſpenſation, as our Lord hath repreſented them in the Parable of thoſe Labourers, who were hired into the Vineyard at the Eleventh*

Serm. IV. *Hour. But, being well aware withal, how perverſe a Uſe might be made of that Parable, I eſteem'd it my Duty, from the Inſtance of* the Thief upon the Croſs, *to lay open thoſe Cheats Men too frequent-*

ly

ly put upon themſelves, by a falſe Application of ſuch Encouragements, as the Scripture is ſuppoſed to allow a Late or Death-Bed Repentance. Hoping that theſe Conſiderations might be effectual for bringing my Reader to a Sight and ſerious Senſe of the Neceſſity of a ſpeedy Reformation; I thought the Frailty of Ser. V, VI. *Humane Nature, and an Account of thoſe Ingredients which make up a true Repentance, might follow very ſeaſonably; which St.* Peter's Fall *and* Recovery *may ſerve for a convenient Illuſtration of. Moreover, in regard the Scriptures ſpeak of a very remarkable Change, effected by the Spirit of God in our Hearts, which, by Reaſon of its Agent and Operation being inviſible, hath been by Some exploded and denyed as a Fanciful Notion, by Others miſinterpreted to the great hazard of Souls, for an Almighty, Neceſſary and Inſtantaneous Act; The Next Thing that ſeem'd requiſite* Serm. VII, VIII. *was, to maintain the Certainty, to illuſtrate the Manner, and to ſhew the Priviledges and Conditions, of this ſpiritual Regeneration. In all which Argument the Truth owes ſo much to the accurate Labours of a late learned and excellent Perſon of our own Church, that it is hard* Dr. *Clag.* Operations of the Spirit. *for*

for any Man who treats of this Subject after him, not to tread more closely in his Steps, than such as read more for Entertainment than Edification, are like to be very well contented with.

Having thus led my Reader gradually to the Change from an Unregenerate, to the truly Christian State; I thought it reasonable to consider some of those Difficulties, which might check his vigorous
Ser. IX, X. *Advances in it. Among these the First are those erroneous Principles, which I have endeavoured to refute, by shewing the true Importance of the Parable of the* Marriage Feast, *and what Inferences may fairly be drawn from thence, for setting the Ordinary Methods of a Christian's* Calling *and Election in their true Light. And then from another Passage*
Serm. XI. *of the like Parable in St.* Luke, *I proceed to urge the Necessity of Religion, and a strict and constant Regard to it, upon the Men who plead Worldly Business and Lawful Cares, in excuse for their Neglect of Spiritual Duties. But some there are of a Complexion so different from those last mentioned, that they think they never have done, never can do*
Serm. XII, XIII, XIV. *enough; Instead of following their honest Affairs, and indulging their unavoidable*

voidable Infirmities, they ſink under the Burden of Both; and imagine that they are loſt, becauſe not ſufficiently Spiritualized: Their Frailties and Imperfections they look upon as Marks of wanting true Grace and ſaving Faith: And, for miniſtring that Eaſe and Encouragement due to Perſons thus diſpoſed, I have conſidered at large, the Caſe of a Weak *and* Imperfect Faith, *and the Scruples which are moſt uſually obſerved to ariſe from it.* Laſtly, *Since, in deſpight of all* Serm. XV. *the Declarations to be found in Scripture of the Contrary, and of all the Reaſons reſulting from the Natural Tendency of the* Thing; *Affliction is by ſome weak or carnal Minds reputed a conſtant Mark of God's Diſpleaſure, and a Hindrance, rather than any Help, to a Chriſtian's Obedience; I ſhut up this Volume with a View of our Bleſſed Lord's* Reſignation *to his Heavenly Father's Will, and ſuch Reflections drawn from thence, as may be both our Comfort and Direction under any Calamities, which it ſhall pleaſe God to lay upon us.*

This ſhort Account is what I thought a ſeaſonable Introduction, that the Reader might come a little prepared, and know

know beforehand what he is to expect. In which, if, after all, he find himself at any time disappointed; I beg him to remember that he himself also is a Man; and that my Desire is rather to profit than to please all into whose Hands these Papers shall come. If they who peruse them are made better Christians, my Purpose is answered, and my Pains rewarded effectually. And to this best of all Effects, I most humbly beg of God, to render my poor Labours in some degree Successful.

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SER.

SERMON I.

AGAINST Unneceſſary Curioſity IN *Matters of Religion.*

St. John XXI. 22.

Jeſus ſaith unto him; if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

OUR Bleſſed Saviour, at the Eighteenth Verſe, had ſignified to St. *Peter*, by what particular ſort of Death he ſhould glorify God. He, upon hearing his own Fate determin'd, enquires concerning St. *John*, the Author of this Goſpel, how Chriſt intended to diſpoſe of Him. But our Lord, not thinking fit to gratify his Curioſity in

this Point, makes the Reply contained in my Text; *Jeſus ſaith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

The natural Importance of which Anſwer, is, no doubt, a Reproof to St. *Peter*'s unneceſſary Inquiſitiveneſs into a Matter, which it no way concern'd him to know: And an Intimation withal, that the great and only thing he ought to be ſolicitous for, was to prepare himſelf for the Diſcharge of his own Duty. And, as Providence intended to liken him to his Maſter in the manner of his Death, ſo his Thoughts ſhould be employed in taking good heed to be like him, in a meek, and patient, and conſtant ſuffering of the Tryals appointed for himſelf.

Now the Rebuke applyed here to one particular Inſtance, I ſhall ſo treat of at this time, as to render it an Admonition of general Uſe and Benefit. For ſuch, no doubt, it may prove to every Chriſtian, if we from this Example take the hint of forbearing to indulge all needleſs Curioſities in Matters of Religion: And, bending our Studies to thoſe Objects which have a direct

direct Tendency to Practice and a good Life, lay aside such aiery Speculations, as deservedly fall under this Reprehension of our Saviour; *If it be thus, or thus, what is that to thee?*

Now I would fain hope, That even in this busy and pretending Age of Ours, men might be prevailed upon, thus far to consult their own Ease and Benefit, would they but seriously consider these Three Arguments.

1. First, *That Many, if not Most, of the abstruse Points of Religion are beset with such Difficulties, as they cannot receive any positive and full Satisfaction in.*

2. Secondly, *That could they go to the bottom of all these Difficulties, yet such Knowledge would be of little, or no real use to them.*

3. Thirdly, *That the employing their Thoughts in such intricate Questions, is not only fruitless but dangerous; and many times of very fatal Consequence, to themselves, to others, and to Religion in general.*

This I shall endeavour to convince you, is ordinarily the Case of those nice and curious Persons, who spend their time and pains in the speculative

Parts of Religion: And not only ſo, but I ſhall urge withal, that the Study of the Practical and neceſſary Duties is the very Reverſe of all this. That theſe are very poſſible to be attain'd; exceeding profitable when underſtood; and that all the Hours and Induſtry laid out upon them, turn to the trueſt, the beſt account, both for our Selves, and for the Publick.

I. *My firſt Diſcouragement againſt curious Speculations in Matters of Religion conſiſts in this; that they are entangled with ſuch Difficulties, as men cannot receive any poſitive and particular Satisfaction in.* And would not one chooſe of the two, rather to ſit ſtill and be idle, than to travel through Briars and Thorns, and after infinite Toil and Trouble, give out at laſt, heartily tired with one's Journey, but ſtill as far from the End, as when he firſt ſet out? And yet this is the Conſequence of thoſe ſublime Notions and ſubtle Diſtinctions, which have taken up the Thoughts, and employed the Pens, and ſwell'd the Volumes of a great many Learned Men in almoſt all, but eſpecially in theſe later, Ages of the Church. The Myſterious Union

on of the Bleſſed Trinity, and that of two Natures in the Perſon of our Saviour Chriſt: The Secrets of Providence, and the Methods of Divine Grace; the State of Souls departed, and the particular Nature and Quality of thoſe Rewards and Puniſhments, which await men in the next World. Theſe, and abundance more ſuch Points there are, in which the Scriptures have given us ſome general Inſight, as much as is neceſſary for our preſent purpoſe. But when men, *not content to be wiſe according to that which is written*, plunge themſelves into Controverſies, about the particular Modes and Circumſtances of them, the farther they wade, the more they are carried out of their Depth. And how ſhould it be otherwiſe indeed? For when all is ſaid and done, theſe are Subjects not of a ſize with us; our own Underſtanding is not qualified to fathom them. The Light from above is our only ſafe Guide in theſe matters: So far then as this leads us, we may go on boldly, and ſtand upon ſure and firm ground; but where that Light forſakes us, all the Diſcoveries pretended to beyond, muſt needs be very

fanciful, and precarious, and weak. So full of Deluſion are thoſe very profound Contemplations, which loſe the Mind in matters too high for it; ſo liable to that Reproach of St. *Paul*, * though in another Signification of the words; for *Theſe men too becoming vain in their Imaginations, their fooliſh heart is darkned, and profeſſing themſelves to be wiſe, they become Fools.*

* Rom. I. 21, 22.

But now the moſt important part of Religion is of a quite different kind. For, thoſe things which the Goſpel commands to be believed, or done, in order to Salvation, lie level to every ordinary Capacity. Thus for Belief; It asks no mighty Depth, for a Man to convice himſelf, *that* what the God of Truth hath revealed, ought readily to be embraced; *that* He, who was pleaſed to declare his Will to Mankind, did certainly do it with a deſign to be underſtood; *that* therefore we ought to take his word in its plain and natural Senſe, except where there appears manifeſt Reaſon to the contrary: *That* its containing ſome things which we cannot perfectly comprehend, (eſpecially when treating of God's own Nature, and Operations) is

is no good Argument of any Neceſſity, to take him otherwiſe. Becauſe our Reaſon tells us, that God is infinite, and yet it tells us at the ſame time too, that infinite he could not be, if a finite Mind could fully comprehend him. In a word, it requires Modeſty and Integrity, rather than Acuteneſs and Skill, to be ſatisfied, that the true and proper Foundation of Faith is, not the Quality or Perſpicuity of the things revealed, but the Authority and Teſtimony of the Party revealing. Theſe are matters that lie ſufficiently fair and open to every conſiderate Perſon; and They who come to the Scriptures with theſe Impreſſions, will find no difficulty in aſſenting to what they meet with there; nor any occaſion for flying to wretched Criticiſms, as an Expedient for bringing down the loftieſt Doctrines to their own narrow Apprehenſions.

So again; for the Moral Precepts of Piety, and Juſtice, and Charity, and Purity, and Meekneſs, and Patience, and Perſeverance, and the like; Theſe are ſo ſuited to our natural Notions of God and Goodneſs, that, if a Man hath but once thrown off the dead weight

of his own Prejudices and corrupt Inclinations, they cannot but caſt the Scale againſt the contrary Vices. Nor muſt I, upon this occaſion, forget to put put you in mind, that the Practice of Religion is a mighty Help to our more compleat Knowledge of it. It is ſo, as it engages our diligent Attention and fervent Love to that which is good. It is ſo, as it ſecures Probity of Mind, a teachable and impartial Diſpoſition. It is ſo, as it entitles us to the Bleſſing of God upon our Studies: Whoſe Goodneſs will never ſuffer thoſe who ſerve and ſeek him with their whole Heart, to continue in dangerous and fatal Miſtakes. So manifeſt is the Advantage of applying our ſelves to this part of Religion, in which a Chriſtian's proper Buſineſs lies; So poſſible, ſo certain, that all who do ſo, ſhall effectually improve by their Endeavours; So unalterable that Promiſe of him, who came to direct us in the right Way to Happineſs, that

* John. VII. 17. * *If any man will do his will, he ſhall not fail to know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.*

II. *Secondly*, My next Argument againſt indulging nice and curious Speculations

culations of this kind, is taken from the *Unprofitableneſs of them.* Our Lord, had he ſo pleaſed, could have informed St. *Peter*, what ſhould become of this beloved Diſciple: But he reproves his enquiring into it, becauſe no Benefit was to be had by ſuch Information. For ſo we may very reaſonably interpret that Paſſage, *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?* "How wilt thou be the better, "if I ſhould tell thee what this Man "ſhall do? What Furtherance can it "prove to thy Preparation for following Me, to know whether he "ſhall be required to tread in the ſame "Steps"? And I cannot but think it would puzzle the wiſeſt Man alive, to give a ſatisfactory account, what ends, of Conſequence to our Everlaſting Happineſs, would be ſerved, by being let into a clear and diſtinct View of all thoſe dark, myſterious Truths, which are now in ſo great a degree lockt up from us; or how Religion would, upon thoſe Terms, be in a better State than now it is.

Let us put the Caſe in one or two of theſe Inſtances already mentioned, *that* the Trinity of Perſons in Unity

of

of the Divine Eſſence, and the Incarnation of the Son of God were fully underſtood by us. I deſire to know now, whether this would at all promote our Zeal in the Love and Service of God; or what one Argument we ſhould then have, which at preſent we have not, for being better Men, or more thankful Chriſtians. The true ground of our Reverence and Fear, our Love and Truſt in God, is a due Senſe of his Holineſs and Wiſdom, his Power, and Juſtice, and Goodneſs. And what dependence, I beſeech you, have our Notions of theſe Attributes, upon our knowing how God is *Three* in *One?* The proper Motives to a Chriſtian Life are Gratitude, and a juſt Regard to the adorable Myſtery of Man's Redemption; the Mercy of having our Sins pardoned, and ſatisfied for; the Rewards propoſed to our ſincere Obedience, the terrible Puniſhments of obſtinate Offenders, and the little Reaſon we have to flatter our ſelves with hopes of *eſcaping, if we neglect ſo great Salvation?* Now theſe Affections ſpring from our conſidering the infinite Kindneſs and Condeſcention of the Son of God, who

Heb. II. 3.

who humbled himſelf to do ſo many wonderful, and to ſuffer ſo many bitter, things for our Sakes. But the Mercy of his doing and enduring theſe things in Nature, will not touch our hearts one whit the more tenderly, for diſcerning how this Nature of Ours was united to his Divine Nature. It is the thing's being done, and not the particular manner by which it was done, that muſt have this Effect upon us. So likewiſe for the reſt; The Influences of Divine Grace would not be more prevalent, nor is Their Condemnation, who ſtifle and reſiſt them, leſs deſerved; becauſe we ſee not all the Springs, by which the Holy Spirit moves and bends us. It is ſufficient, that he acts as he does, to render both our Obedience poſſible, and our Obſtinacy inexcuſable. The Conſiderations fitted to contain men in their Duty, are the Greatneſs and the Certainty of the Puniſhments threatned to wicked Livers: As, on the other hand, the powerful Incentives to doing and ſuffering with Conſtancy what God appoints us to, are the Excellence and the Aſſurance of a future Recompence. But, if the being warn'd in ſo ſolemn

and

and expreſs a manner as we are, that Torments everlaſting and extream remain for the Ungodly, will not reſtrain us from being ſuch our ſelves; neither would we be reſtrained, though God had told us, whether that Torment be material Fire, or whether it be ſuch, as for the exquiſite and inſupportable Anguiſh of it, was thought convenient to be repreſented to us by Everlaſting Burnings. If we will not be perſwaded to *live* and *die unto the Lord*, by theſe ſupporting Reflections, that *the Sufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the Glory that ſhall be revealed in us*, and, that it neither hath entred nor can enter *into the heart of man to conceive* the *things which God hath prepared for them that love him*; What additional Force could theſe Reflections poſſibly receive, by our being acquainted, wherein each Excellence of that Glory, and theſe Joys conſiſts? For ſtill the ſame Temptations to Sin and Infidelity, would continue: And They who refuſe to take God's Word for the Greatneſs and the Certainty of future Rewards and Puniſhments, (which are the only Qualifications neceſſary to

Rom. VIII. 18.

1 Cor. II. 9.

quicken

quicken us in our Duty) would not have wanted any one Objection, which they now pretend to urge, againſt whatever God ſhould have revealed concerning the Nature and Quality of thoſe Rewards and Puniſhments. If men ſhall be Happy or Miſerable for ever, and as Happy or Miſerable as they are capable of being; it matters not much after what manner they ſhall be ſo: That they ſhall be ſo at all, depends upon the Will of God, that they believe they ſhall be ſo, is from an Aſſent to the Word of God, declaring that Will. And if the Revelation of God find no Credit, as to theſe things in general, there is but little appearance; that it would have gained more Credit, had he deſcribed the whole Proceſs, and deſcended to every Circumſtance of theſe things: For the Truth and Declaration of God being the only Motive of Aſſent common to both theſe Caſes; it unavoidably follows, that there would be the ſame reaſon for witholding it in the One, that there can poſſibly be in the Other.

Nay, ſhall I carry this Point a little higher? I may do it; and dare appeal to all that hear me, whether in the Judgment

Judgment of every conſiderate and unprejudic'd Chriſtian, it be not for the Dignity and Advantage of Religion, that ſome Articles of it exceed the largeſt humane Comprehenſion. Whether we ſhould entertain the ſame awful Impreſſions of the Divine Majeſty, if the Perfections of his Nature and Operations were ſuch only, as we could ſee to the end of, and in every reſpect account to our Reaſon for. Whether it do not raiſe the value of Man's Redemption, to have been brought about by Miracles of Mercy, not only without Example, but even beyond our preſent Underſtanding. Had all theſe things been leſs, we ſhould have known them better; but ſo much as you abate of them to bring them nearer to Mens Capacity, ſo much you weaken the Power of them upon their Affections. And the influencing mens Affections, is the direct and great Buſineſs of Religion: For Theſe are the Springs that move us, and according as They are ſet higher or lower, we ſhall be ſure to act with more or leſs Vigour. It is therefore, in Reality, the very Commendation and Excellence of theſe Doctrines, that they are

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ſo far above us; becauſe the height and greatneſs of the Subject is more ſerviceable to the ends they were deſigned to promote, than their being obvious and intelligible throughout, could poſſibly have rendred them. We ſhould eſteem it an inſtance of the Divine Goodneſs no leſs than Wiſdom, ſo to have tempered his Revelations, that we want no Knowledge fit to engage our Piety, and holy Wonder; and yet we have not ſo much, as ſhould deſtroy our Humility and Reverence. In a Word, both the Light which is allowed us, and that which is denied us, if a right uſe be made of both, do mutually conſpire to carry on the Advantage of Religion. And we have reaſon to believe, it could not have been better; nay, probably not near ſo well, if either leſs had been diſcovered to us, or leſs concealed from us.

So ſmall Improvement is there to be had from bold and buſy Intruſions into thoſe Secrets, which God hath, like *the Ark of old*, forbidden to be ſeen. But now a diligent Attendance upon the plain Preceptive parts of the Chriſtian Inſtitution, This brings in vaſt and preſent Profit, ſuch as grows every day

day upon our hands, and approves it self to all the World, by its visible and excellent Effects. For This hath a direct Influence upon the Dispositions and Manners of Men, corrects depraved Nature, and cultivates those Virtues, which contribute to our own Perfection, and the Good of Others. This puts us upon making our Light shine before men, by filling the Post Providence hath placed us in. It secures a diligent and faithful Regard to those several Capacities and Relations, in the satisfying whereof not only the Peace and Happiness of the World, but the good Pleasure of God, and the Duty of each Person's particular Calling consists. And God, who is a Lover of men, thinks himself much better served, when we become useful, and publick Blessings to the Age we live in, than by the most refined Knowledge, and rapturous Contemplation. These, at the best, are but Personal and solitary Excellencies, and contribute little or nothing to the Common good: From hence, I presume, it is, that St. *Paul* prefers * *Charity* before *the Gift of Prophecy*, and understanding *all mysteries and all knowledge*; assuring us

* Cor. XIII. 1.

at

at the ſame time, That theſe are glittering Advantages, which dazzle our Eyes with a falſe Light, as oft as Chriſtian Perfection is placed in them; for that it is very poſſible for a Man, even ſuppoſing him to attain to all theſe, yet in the Eſteem of God ſtill *to be nothing*. Such Enforcement hath even the Authority of an Apoſtle given to my *Second*, which yet is not the greateſt Diſcouragement I have to urge: For,

III. *Thirdly*, Such Speculations are not only uſeleſs, but *extreamly dangerous too, and many times of very dreadful Conſequence To the Perſons employed in them; To others, and To Religion in general.*

1. *The Perſons themſelves* ſuffer by them, in being taken off from more uſeful and important Subjects: For the Difficulty of theſe devours their time, engroſſes their Thoughts, and leaves them neither Leiſure nor Inclination for attending to the plainer and weightier Matters of the Law. The Knowledge of our Duty, 'tis true, may be brought within a ſmall compaſs, but the Practice of it requires all our time and pains. Paſſions and

Lusts are not subdued in an Instant, and the Attacks of Temptation come on so thick, that our constant Watchfulness and utmost Care is no more than needs. They who employ themselves, as they ought, upon these Occasions, will find that Providence hath cut them out Work enough for their whole Lives. And were there no other Inconvenience attending these nice Speculations, yet this alone, is too much in all Conscience, that they rob those men of a great portion of their time, who have no time to spare. The Knowledge of these will make no Article in our last great Account, and is what we may be very good Christians without; but the practical Precepts are expressly given us in charge, and will be sure to be strictly reckon'd for: These are so many Branches of the *One thing necessary*, and all is lost, if we suffer any thing else to come in between, and take That away from us.

But further yet, Such Curiosity does not only divert our more vigorous pursuit after Vertue, but it tinctures the Mind very strongly with several sorts of Vice. Hence the Apostle takes notice of a * *Knowledge which puffeth up,*

* 1 Cor. VIII. 2.

up, and ſets this in Oppoſition to *Charity*, which *edifieth*: And in another place, he deſcribes the Conſequence of not being content to reſt in the plain *wholeſome words of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt*, by ſaying, * That ſuch Perſons are *proud, knowing nothing, but doting about Queſtions and Strifes of words, whereof cometh Envy, Strife, Railings, Evil Surmiſings, Perverſe Diſputings of men of corrupt minds.* And this is likewiſe but too viſible, that ſuch men grow immoderately fond of ſome peculiar Notions, by which they affect to diſtinguiſh themſelves: This engages them in Controverſy, which ſowrs their Temper, and ſharpens their Pens, and makes the Contention as hot and fierce, as if in theſe Quarrels too, that falſe Punctilio of fantaſtick Honour were to take place, never to acknowledge Satisfaction, till they have drawn Blood of their Adverſary. All which, as it is of infinite ill Conſequence to themſelves, ſo is it

* 1 Tim. VI. 45.

2. *Secondly*, Matter of mighty Scandal *to Others*. For Standers-by, though they ought not to do ſo, yet if they be ill diſpoſed, they will be but too apt to cover their own Irreligion with

the pretence of vehement Diſputes, and indecent Heats about Religion; to fall into Scepticiſm and univerſal doubting, when they find men ſo eager in Differences, wherein, if others cannot form a clear Judgment, it is not to be wondred at. And ſuch, as all People are never like to be brought to one mind about, while the World endures: Nay, even Good men cannot but Lament and be diſpleaſed, to ſee ſuch intemperate Admirers of Singularity and Diſtinctions, loſe Charity and Moderation, the very Life and Subſtance of Religion, while they are contending for the Subtleties of the Schools, which are in compariſon but as thin Air, and empty Shadows. And it would really move ones Indignation, that men ſhould have the Vanity to imagine, they do any true Service to the Cauſe of God and Religion, by an ungovern'd Fervour, which ſeems to be little or not at all concern'd, what becomes of Humanity and Juſtice, good Nature or good Manners, provided the Writer can but acquire to himſelf the Reputation of Smartneſs, and Subtlety, and Skill. And can there happen a greater Calamity, not only to

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the Perſons thus corrupted and ſeduced, but, which is worſt of all,

3. *Thirdly*, To *the Chriſtian Inſtitution in general*, than to be thus unfairly dealt by? To have the Excellence of the Goſpel falſly placed, in Matters wherein the Power and Eſſence of Godlineſs does not at all conſiſt? Can there be any Courſe more deſtructive to ſound Religion, than to repreſent it as a meer Science; as if men were better or worſe, in proportion to what they *know*, and not in proportion to what they *do*? And do not our Eyes plainly ſee the ill Effect of pretending to theſe lofty Speculations? Are not men a thouſand times more intent upon the Diſputes between contending Parties, than they are upon the Practice of that which all Parties agree to be neceſſary? Do not even the Vulgar now a days, the People of every Age and Sex, and Condition, take an Eſtimate of their own Improvements, by what they are able to ſay for, or againſt, ſome difficult and warmly debated Points; rather than by the Conformity of their Lives to the plain and indiſpenſable Duties? And whence all this, but from an itch of being

thought might Reasoners, ignorant of none, not even the darkest and deepest Mysteries of Christ? And this Vanity is followed close at the heels by a nauseating of the most valuable and profitable Parts of Religion; for that every thing, wherein the true Worth and Advantage of them lies: I mean, the honest Plainness of all necessary Doctrines, and, that God hath not required Artifice, and Skill, and a great reach of Parts, but hath qualified the Simplicity of Babes, a common Capacity, assisted with conscientious Industry, for working out Salvation. And how perverse a humour is this, which thinks nothing worth its Study, which does not give it Trouble? Whereas, in truth, it is with our spiritual, as with our natural Food, That affords us best Nourishment, which is easiest of Digestion; and the Man grows in both Respects, not by trying the Strength of his Stomach, but by the Health and Vigour, which proceeds from Exercise and Sustenance duly distributed: For search the Bible throughout, and you shall not find there so much as One single Promise made to Knowledge, abstracted from Practice: Action is that

which

which must crown all our Studies; and what our Saviour said to his Disciples, is true of every Christian, and of every Branch of Divinity; not *Happy are ye if ye know these things*, but * *if we know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.* *Joh XIII 17.

I am sensible much more might have been said to this purpose, but at present, I only beg leave to draw two or three Inferences from this Discourse, and so conclude.

1. And *First*, It is no hard matter from hence to discover, upon what occasions the study of sublime and controverted Points in Religion, is useful and advisable. It is not to repose our Confidence in, as the *Gnosticks* of old did, who made great account of their boasted Illuminations, though at the same time they allowed themselves in the most beastly Impurities. It is not to expose or overthrow the Mysteries of the Christian Faith; to foment Differences, and blow the Coals of Contention, by forming Parties and Factions, as *Heretick*s and *Schismatick*s do. It is not to feed our Vanity and Ostentation, to play Prizes in Divinity, and make wanton Flourishes of

Subtlety and Wit, as the *School-men* too often seem to have done. It is not to disparage plain practical Knowledge, as if men were wiser, when they choose to shew their Dexterity, by treading out new Paths, than when they travel in the beaten Road to Heaven. It is not, in a word, from *Choice*, but from *Necessity*, that these things should be labour'd in. And this is a Necessity, which conceited Smatterers, or crafty Enemies of Religion lay upon Some, to qualify themselves for countermining them. For God forbid, that the *Stewards of the Mysteries of Christ* should stand by tamely, and look on in silence, while they that hate the Truth are at work, to take away the Ground from under them, upon which their Faith and Hope are built. These men must consider the Charge committed to their Trust, and be prepared, not only with Integrity and Zeal, but with Penetration and Skill. For the best Cause will suffer, if they who undertake it, are not provided with a just Defence; And this Defence cannot be made, without being Masters of the same with their Adversaries, that so they may

detect

detect their falſe Reaſonings, put them out of their Play, and foil them at their own Weapon. It were, no doubt, much happier for You, and Us, and all the World, that we had nothing elſe to attend to, but only to perſwade our People to their reſpective Duties, and explain to them the Methods, how they may beſt *adorn the Doctrine of our God and Saviour in all things*; Greatly to be wiſhed, that the differing Intereſts and Opinions of Chriſtians were ſo compoſed, as to leave no occaſion; Or, if that cannot be, yet that Petulant and Licentious Tongues and Pens were ſo effectually reſtrained, as never to give any juſt Provocation for ſuch Diſputes: For the leſs of theſe there is, the better to be ſure it is, not only for the Churches Peace, but for the Quiet and good Government of the State too. We muſt be provided with Arms, becauſe we are liſted in the publick Service; but we ſhall do well to remember, by whoſe Commiſſion we act, and never uſe thoſe Arms, but when our Maſter's Honour and Religion are in Danger.

2. *Secondly*, Let me prevail on you for this moſt reaſonable Requeſt, That from

from the Uncertainty of some abstruse Points in Religion, you *would not make any Conclusions to the prejudice of Religion in general.* Though inexplicable Difficulties may lie on both sides of some Questions, this does not hinder the Authority of easy and uncontestable Truths. And, though Some, that enter the Lists upon these Occasions, may lay about them madly, like Fencers in the dark, and cut and gash one another without Mercy; yet be assured, there are such Vertues, as Meekness and Christian Charity in the World. It is a general Rule in all Arts and Sciences, to make those things that are Plain, a Foundation and Introduction to those that are Obscure: But no where, I think, except in Religion, have men ever been so fantastical and absurd, as to deny and cast off all regard to things that are Plain, for the sake of those that are Obscure. This is just as if an undisciplin'd Reader should reject all *Euclid*'s Axioms, because he finds himself unable to demonstrate every *Proposition* in his Book. There is not any one of our pert Disputers against *Jesus* and *Divine Revelation*, but would think it a Reproach upon

upon his underſtanding, to treat any other Author, at the rate he does the inſpired Writers of Holy Scripture. When therefore men are looſen'd in their Principles of Religion, upon ſuch poor and frivolous accounts, as would not be allowed ſufficient to ſhake the Principles of any other Science (ſuch particularly, as Learned Mens differing in their Judgment about ſome difficult Points of it) This is but too plain a Diſcovery, that ſomething elſe is caſt into the Scale, beſides the real Merits of the Cauſe: And that ſuch People cavil at Religion, not becauſe they have Reaſon to think it is not true; but becauſe they wiſh it were not, and apprehend it for their Eaſe and Intereſt, that it ſhould not be, true.

3. *Laſtly*, I cannot upon this occaſion, forbid my ſelf addreſſing to you, the Members of our eſtabliſhed Church in particular, moſt earneſtly beſeeching you, to *conſider the Privileges you enjoy, and to make a right Improvement of them.* You have not the Word of Truth lock'd up from you in an unknown Tongue, nor are prohibited to uſe it freely. You are permitted, entreated, commanded to peruſe

peruse it diligently: And we are very sure, the more you do so, the more *ready* you will be to give *a reason of the hope that is in you*, and the less liable to be driven *about by every blast of Doctrine*. Let me only beg, that, along with this Diligence, you would bring Meekness and Modesty, an honest Disposition, and godly Fear: That you would reflect very seriously upon the End for which God hath thus imparted his Will to Mankind, which is not to entertain so much as to edify men; to *make them wise* indeed, but *wise unto Salvation*. And consequently, that keeping constantly this end in view, and avoiding intricate and unseasonable Questions, which the Apostle tells us, do but *ingender strife*, and perplex the minds of the unwary, stick close to those plain profitable passages, which may stand you in good stead at the last great Day of Account; Such as may excite your Piety, enflame your Devotion, reform your Manners, and render you useful and exemplary in your respective Stations and Capacities; Such as may bring advantage to the Publick, by reducing and mortifying all those unruly Passions

ſions and Affections, which obſtruct Peace and Order, Charity and Juſtice. For be very confident, that He who lives beſt, does in the Chriſtian Senſe know moſt; And every one of competent Parts and Induſtry may know enough for theſe purpoſes. *God hath ſhewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do juſtly, and to love Mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?* * Micah. VI. 8. This is a ſhort and a plain Leſſon, and yet even this well learnt, would not fail to bring us all to Heaven. I ſhut up all with two memorable Paſſages of *Moſes* and the *Son of Sirach*, to this purpoſe, The Former in the XXIXth of *Deuteronomy* at the laſt Verſe, *Secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but thoſe things which are revealed belong unto us, and unto our Children for ever; that we may do all the words of this Law.* The Latter in *Eccluſ.* III. 21, *&c. Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither ſearch the things that are above thy ſtrength. But what is commanded thee think thereupon with Reverence, for it is not needful for thee to ſee with thine Eyes the things that be in ſecret, Be not curious in unneceſſary matters; for more things*

things are shewed unto thee, than Men understand. For many are deceived by their own vain opinion, and an evil Suspicion hath overthrown their Judgment. Without Eyes thou shalt want light, profess not therefore the knowledge that thou hast not. This wholsome Advice God gives us all the Grace to follow, that we may receive the Truth in *the Spirit of Meekness*, and *obey it in the Love thereof*, for Jesus Christ his Sake. To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, Three Persons and One God, be all Honour and Glory, now and for evermore. *Amen.*

SERMON

SERMON II.

THE HOLINESS Required in a Christian's Conversation.

Ephes. V. 11.

Have no fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness.

GREAT part of this Epistle, and particularly this Chapter, is employ'd, in urging the Advantages these *Ephesians* had receiv'd, by being converted to Christianity; and the Improvements it was expected they should make of them. To this purpose the Apostle advises them * *to walk as Children of Light, To prove what is the good and acceptable Will*

* Vers. 8, 9, 10.

Will of the Lord, and in order to their doing so, to shake hands with their old Corruptions, and *have no Fellowship with the unfruitful Works of Darkness.*

In treating of these Words, I design to speak to these four following Particulars.

I. I will shew, *What those things are, which the Apostle here commands us to avoid, under this detestable Title.* The Works of Darkness.

II. *What it is to* have no fellowship with them.

III. I shall press the Reason *for avoiding those Works, which the Text hath couched, by calling them* unfruitful, and then

IV. *I shall apply my self from the whole, to the persuading every one of us, to act like men duly convinc'd of the former Heads, and the Engagements that lie upon us with regard to them.*

I. I shall shew, What those things are, which the Apostle here commands us to avoid, under the detestable Title, *The works of Darkness.* And here it is fit I put you in mind, that all

all sins indeed, of what nature or Quality soever, are such Works; and that we are absolutely forbidden any kindness for, and Intimacy with them all. For, whether by Darkness we understand Ignorance and Error, or whether those Regions of horrour inhabited by Devils and damned Spirits, the Title will very properly belong to them in both respects. Every Sin is owing in some measure to a defect in the mind, and wrong Apprehensions of things; Every one leads to those dismal Regions of Death; Every one derives it self from the Prince of Darkness, and is originally his Work. But, because even of sins there are differences to be made, both as to the degree, and as to the malignity of them; since some do more manifestly carry the Character and Features of that old Serpent, whose Spawn they are; I will just mention some few, which seem by way of Eminence to challenge this Title. Now, Of These Some were more peculiar to the Pagan World, and such as St. *Paul* had an immediate respect to in this Chapter, particularly that Idolatrous and Polluted Worship, and all those vain Su-

perſtitions, which even the wiſeſt, and moſt Learned Heathens had ſubmitted themſelves to. And Others of them are ſuch, as do even now, notwithſtanding all the Light and Advantages of Chriſtianity, endanger mens Souls, and draw them into a Reſemblance of the Devil, whoſe qualities they are. Such eſpecially are Pride and Ambition, Envy and Malice, Lying and Diſſimulation, Faction and Treachery, and the Tempting others to Sin: For under theſe Qualities the Devil is repreſented in Scripture, and the Deviliſh Nature of theſe Vices is ſufficiently manifeſted, as ſoon as they are named. So that without further enlarging upon ſo odious a Subject, I ſhall think my ſelf now at liberty to deſcend to my

II. *Second* Particular, which was deſigned to enquire, *What it is to have no fellowſhip with theſe works of Darkneſs.* And here I can by no means think it proper, to put the avoiding the Commiſſion of the groſſeſt Sins, much leſs contracting the habits of them, into this account. For to call the Inſolent and Haughty, the Uncharitable and Cenſorious, the Contentious and the Slanderer, the man that repines

repines at Good, and triumphs in misery and mischief; that disguises himself, and deceives and betrays others; to call Him, I say, only a *Partaker* in Wickedness; To allow the zealous Advocates for Sin, and busy Factors of the Devil, them who make it their Business to put Vertue and Religion out of Countenance, to corrupt all they converse with, and carry on his Trade here upon Earth, I say, To allow such Wretches as these so gentle a Name, as men that *have Fellowship* with Works of Darkness; is to shew a great deal more Civility to Vice, than becomes us. This were to give too much Reputation to Sin, by softning the worst of Practices, and representing them to the World, under such extenuating Terms. It is necessary the Works of Darkness shou'd have no Veil drawn before them, but be expos'd to the View of Mankind in their true Colours; and that every one shou'd be made throughly sensible, whose business he carries on, and what he is doing, and how great a guilt he contracts, when he indulges himself in any of those Abominations. And therefore I shall now proceed to tell

you, what other Instances of forsaking such Corruptions the Apostle must in all reason be acknowledged to require here; and that none of us can answer the Character of *Children of Light*, unless, to the avoiding the Pollution of such Lusts in our own Persons, we do likewise add these following Particulars.

1. *First, The declining, as much as may be, the Acquaintance and intimate Conversation of notorious and scandalously wicked men.* The Infection of Sin is so rank and spreading, and we in so constant a Disposition to receive it, that no Caution, when prudently us'd, can be too great in this Particular. * The Scriptures have compared vicious Company to *Pitch upon the Clothes*, and *Fire in the Bosom*. And the general Censures, even of men discreet and tender, are apt to bring the Keepers of it under an odious Character. Which abundantly justifies the Comparisons; and argues the universal consent of Reason in the extream danger of such Conversation. The same Discoveries of our Love and Hatred, which Nature and Passion put us upon in Other Cases, must

* Eccles. XIII. 1. Prov. VI. 27.

must be the Work of Reason and Religion in This. And they who industriously place themselves in the way of Temptation, seem to have but a very imperfect Sense of their own Frailties, or else not to have weaned their Inclinations sufficiently from the Lusts they affect such Familiarity with. For, when we cannot be personally intimate with the Devil himself, the next degree of Friendship we can possibly shew for him, is to be fond of conversing with those who are most like him themselves, and whose Examples naturally tend to make others like him too. What Philosophers tell us of some Creatures, that they frequently change their Colour, according to the Stones or Plants their Bodies rest upon, must always be admitted by thinking Persons to be a very lively Emblem of the minds of men. For these ever receive a strong Tincture from the Persons they frequent, and are insensibly form'd into Their Appetites and Opinions; Their Language and Their Manners. And therefore such persons must not think they are ill used, if both God and Good Men condemn those approaches

to Sin, as ſure Arguments of a ſecret kindneſs for it, and ſad Preſages of a dying Zeal for the Honour of Religion, and their own Safety.

Miſtake me not, I beſeech you, I am not here recommending ſuch a ſurpercilious Pride, as we find the Phariſees upon all Occaſions guilty of, ſuch as ſhou'd teach men to diſtinguiſh themſelves from the reſt of the World, with a *Stand off, I am holier than Thou.* No: The Deteſtation of other People's Vices muſt always be ſo temper'd, as not to produce a diſdain for their perſons, nor may we ſo far conſider them as Sinners, as to forget that they are Men. All that I am now adviſing, is only the neceſſary Care for our own Preſervation; And, where the Offices of Charity, and the Courteſies of the World do not endanger our own Souls (as indeed they very ſeldom do, if managed with any competent degree of diſcretion) there we have a pattern in our Bleſſed Saviour himſelf, who, for the ſake of doing good, was content to eat, and to drink with Harlots and Publicanes and Sinners.

But ſtill That Example of His, and All that can be ſaid to ſupport and coun-

countenance the frequenting of bad Company, will never be able to perſuade holy and conſidering men, that they ought to mingle Friendſhips with all indifferently, and to keep no guard at all upon themſelves, in the midſt of a very crooked and perverſe Generation. It gives too much encouragement to Vice, to make it no part of our Averſion; and puts our own welfare upon too deſperate a hazard, to court that diſtemper, which if once caught, may end in Death eternal. It ſhews, that we think very little of the horror of Sin, or the deadly creeping Qualities by which it ſteals into our Souls, when we are loath to be kept at a diſtance from it; and upon ſuch poor pretences, as either the Forms of Civility, or a falſe Confidence in our own Strength and Wiſdom, are us'd to furniſh us with, delight to dwell within the reach of its Infection. This is in effect to throw dry Stubble into the Fire, to commit a Body full of ill Humours to the mercy of a raging Peſtilence; For ſuch in truth is the Venemous nature of all Vice, and in ſuch conſtant readineſs are our hearts to catch and ſuck it in.

But yet the ſame Apoſtle, who forbids all *fellowſhip with the works of darkneſs* here, and all ſcandalous Converſation in the Vth of his 1ſt Epiſtle to the *Corinthians*; was ſo ſenſible of the univerſal Corruption of that time and People, that he acknowledges, to avoid vicious Company altogether, a Man muſt even go out of the World. And therefore, ſince the Tares and Wheat muſt ſtand together till the general Harveſt, and the condition of the preſent Life does of neceſſity inferr a mixture of Good and bad men in the ſame common Field of the Church; After the due Care already mention'd to preſerve our ſelves from being tainted by this mixture, The Next thing I preſume neceſſary, and imply'd in St. *Paul*'s Command here, is This,

2. *Secondly*, That *thoſe perſons, who cannot be wholly declin'd, may never be approved, or have their wickedneſs favoured by us.* After a long Deſcription of the Abominations of the Heathen World, this is added as a very high Aggravation of all the reſt, * *That they who knew the Judgments of God, and how worthy of death the Committers of*

* Rom. I. 32.

of ſuch things were, not only did the ſame, but conſented with or took pleaſure in thoſe that did them. This was an Argument, that when ſuch men ſinned, it was not ſo much through the ſtrength of paſſion, and the Violence of an over-bearing Temptation; as out of a ſetled and fixed Judgment, that had debauched their Underſtandings, and reconciled them to the blackeſt, and moſt unnatural Offences. And however we may, for ſome ſecret Reaſons, endeavour to avoid the Commiſſion and Habits of Vice in our own Perſons; yet if we can, with Delight and Complacency, behold the ſame thing in another, there cannot be a ſhrewder ſign, that our Averſions to ſin are not ſo ſtrong, nor grounded upon ſo true and ſound Principles as they ſhould be. For a juſt Senſe of Chriſtianity will beget in us a perfect Antipathy to Sin, wherever we find it; and to profeſs a hatred of it in our own caſe, and yet be very well reconcil'd to it in another Man's; to ſee it acted with Satisfaction, or hear it related with Reliſh and Delight, does certainly betray a hidden Reſerve of Kindneſs in its favour, and that our

our Underſtandings are either but ill convinc'd, or elſe we perverted and byaſs'd in our Affections concerning it.

This Zeal for God and goodneſs, and indignation againſt evil and ungodly Practices, is ſo conſiderable an Ingredient in a Holy Man's Character, that St. *Peter* has left it upon Record, as an eminent Commendation of juſt *Lot*'s Righteouſneſs; That *he was afflicted continually with the filthy Converſation of the Wicked. For* (ſays he) * *That righteous man dwelling among them in ſeeing and hearing, vexed his righteous ſoul, from day to day, with their unlawful deeds.* Thus *David* profeſſes of himſelf, * *It grieveth me when I ſee the Tranſgreſſors*; and again, *Mine eyes guſh out with water, becauſe men keep not thy Law.* And indeed, if the common Rules of Honour require the vindicating of a Friend's Reputation, the men who pretend to govern themſelves by thoſe Rules, wou'd do well to remember how unbecoming it is, patiently to ſee God and Religion, the beſt Friends and the beſt things abus'd and traduc'd; How tame and cold this argues all that profeſs Love, or Value for either.

* 2 Epiſt. 3. c. v. 7, 8.

* Pſal. 119.

Now

Now the open and shameless Wickedness of mens Lives are the greatest disgrace to both. He that keeps himself from this, may be allowed prudent and tender of his own Reputation; but if he gives it any countenance in another, he must not be esteemed truly religious. For a zealous and good Conscience can never be Friends with Wickedness, nor pleas'd with it at any rate, nor endure it with ease on any account, or in any person whatsoever.

3. *Thirdly*, As a manifest Proof, that the *works of darkness* have no countenance from us, I think it another part of our Duty, *to Rebuke them, when that can be properly done.* I add this necessary Limitation, *when that can be properly done*, because there is no one good Office either of a Friend, or a Christian, that requires more cautious and deliberate proceeding, than This of Admonition and Reproof. It is not the business of every Man, nor of every Time, but requires fit Persons, and favourable Seasons; and is attended with a thousand Niceties, which, if not punctually observ'd, may defeat the best Intentions,

and

and render the kindeſt Advices, not only Ineffectual, but Offenſive too. For, tho' Chriſtianity require this neceſſary check upon Vice, yet it no where obliges any body to break through the Rules of Civility and Prudence; It preſerves all thoſe Reſpects entire, which muſt needs follow upon the different Orders, and Conditions of men in the World: It gives no Licence to Sawcineſs, and Ill Manners, under the pretence of holy Indignation, and Zeal. And therefore, when I urge the rebuking theſe *works of darkneſs*, as a Teſtimony of our *having no fellowſhip with them*, All thoſe Qualifications are to be underſtood, which may make ſuch Rebukes, both becoming, and ſucceſsful. And though we are diſpens'd with, for giving that *which is holy to the dogs*, That is Our good Advice to ſuch as we have cauſe to believe will *trample it under foot, and turn again and rent us*; yet where Authority and Opportunity call upon us, where any hope of prevailing to a better Reformation ſhews it ſelf; there we muſt not think our ſelves at liberty, ſo much as to be ſilent. Not to diſlike, is then to conſent

sent and approve: And God, and Truth, and Vertue, have all a right to our Vindication of them. And sure the least we can possibly do, is not to contribute to the disgrace of those things, that shou'd be (and to every good man are) beyond comparison, the deerest of any in the World.

4. *Fourthly*, To disclaim *fellowship with the works of darkness*, effectually, *we must avoid all occasions of, and Tendencies towards them.* There are infinite Accidents in a Man's Life, in which many things may offer themselves, though not strictly Unlawful, yet exceeding Dangerous to be comply'd with. Such are a number of those that naturally occurr in the matters of Temperance, and Chastity; and in All other Cases, where the question concerns the indulging such Passions, and Desires, and Pleasures, as are not in their own nature sinful; but only offend, according to the measures, or some other Circumstances, that attend the gratifying of them. Now the generality of People on these Occasions, are willing to give themselves all the liberty that possibly they can; and rather

ther chooſe to hazard the falling into ſomething that ſhou'd not be done, than to abridge themſelves of any thing that may be done. But This is perhaps one of the moſt deſtructive Courſes in the World; And the more ſo, becauſes it impoſes upon many ſeemingly good perſons in their Judgments of themſelves; and is apt to perſuade them all muſt needs be well, ſo long as they can take Sanctuary in this Teſtimony of their Conſciences, that they do not allow themſelves in any thing, which is poſitively and in its own nature ſinful. But alaſs! They who conſider the Conſtitution of Humane Nature, and the ſubtle Methods of our Tempting Adverſary; by what an eaſy deſcent we are carried down to Hell; how gentle and inſinuating the Allurements and Steps to Wickedneſs are; and how inſenſibly the Fort of our Souls is betray'd, when the Pleaſures of Senſe have laid Reaſon to ſleep, when the Spirits flow gayly, and the Guards of ſevere Thoughts, and ſtrict Religion are over-powered by them; (all which happens even in the moſt lawful Enjoyments ſometimes) They who obſerve theſe things,

I ſay,

I say, These wise and good men will soon discern the necessity of Self-denial; how convenient it is to exercise that Virtue betimes, and not to give our selves the utmost stretch we may. For certainly it becomes every man that is serious in the Business of Salvation, to be as safe as possibly he can: Not only to ruine himself, but to be upon his guard against all Hazards of Ruine. And it was not a hard, but a prudent and needful Commandment, which St. *Paul* has left us; to *abstain from the very appearance of Evil.* They who profess to hate the thing it self, and to repent of it, and to forsake it; and yet wou'd fain be doing what looks like it, and leads to it, cannot escape this Censure at least, of *being Lovers of pleasure more than Lovers of God.* This comes from a perpetual hankering after their Lusts, and shews that they wou'd fain accommodate the matter between Christ and the Devil. They endeavour to divide themselves as equally as may be, Not to be wicked for fear of danger, but yet to be as near wicked as they can too, for Love of Pleasure. And like treacherous and poor-spirited men, who in a dis-

1 Thess. V. 22.

puted

puted Title, act for one Prince to ſerve their own Ends, and are ſecretly in the Intereſts of another to humour their Inclination; ſo theſe men carry it between Vertue and Vice. They have a ſecret Affection for the one; and yet they muſt ſtifle this Affection, becauſe it cannot be to their advantage to own and purſue it publickly. But ſtill their hearts are ever treacherous, ever bending to the wrong ſide; and the bottom of all their pretended Quarrel with Sin, is not ſo Much for its being *a Work of Darkneſs*, as for its being an *Unfruitful Work*.

5. *Fifthly and Laſtly*; The thing, which contains, and which muſt perfect all the reſt, is what the Apoſtle urges in the End of this Verſe, *Reproving thoſe Works*: I mean by the conſtant Tenure of a pious and exemplary Converſation. For that is the Reproof he means there. The expoſing them by this means to the World, and diſcovering all the Horrour and Deformity of them. The Shortneſs of our Capacities, and the intricate Natures of things make it neceſſary for us, to advance in Knowledge by the help of Compariſons; And the quickeſt

way

way to it, is by setting Opposite Qualities before our eyes at once to contemplate both, and so to discern the difference between them. Now as none are more Contrary, so none do more manifestly illustrate each other, than Vertue and Vice; which are therefore very elegantly represented by the Apostle here, under the two most distant and irreconcilable Figures of *Light* and *Darkness*. But all the Life, and Efficacy of this Representation depends upon the Practice. It is not a plausible declaiming against the One, nor the most elegant Harangue in Praise of the Other, that can sufficiently recommend This, or condemn That. Because, though the Characters be never so just, yet Words are but matter of form, and may be employed upon any subject, for private respects, contrary to the inward and real Sense of the Speaker. But the Esteem which comes to Religion by a good Life cannot be counterfeit. These Actions of a Man prove themselves, and shew the power of Godliness upon the Soul. And in such a Case, none is so blind, but he sees the Beauties of Holiness; how it shines

and ſheds its Rays like the Sun; not only to the delight, but the benefit and warmth of all that are within the Sphere of its Activity; What a foil the contrary Vices are to it, how black and diſmal, how ugly and crooked they look, when brought to this Light; and ſet againſt the ſtreight and uniform, the ſweet and charming Excellencies of Religion. This comes home to the meaneſt Underſtandings, and ſupplies the place of all the Eloquence in the World. It convinces where nothing elſe can enter; It is a ſort of mechanical Reaſon, without the ſtudied Methods of Rhetorick and Argument; and will not fail to draw, where thoſe cannot ſo much as move. This is therefore the peculiar advantage of a holy Life, to check and diſcountenance Sin; to ſhew it in its true and worſt Colours, and not only to receive Luſtre from, but to reflect it back again upon Vertue and Religion.

From what has been delivered in theſe Particulars, we ſee the true extent of the Apoſtle's Command, and our Duty with regard to it; How falſe thoſe men are to God and Religion, who content themſelves with avoiding the groſſeſt

groſſeſt and fouleſt Offences, if in the mean while they indulge their Luſts, and expoſe their Souls to the Snares of evil Company; If they retain any ſecret Fondneſs for Sin, and can ſo much as with eaſe or patience, ſee or hear what is ſo; If they are ſo tame and cold in the Cauſe of God and Religion, as not boldly and ſharply to rebuke Vice, where that can be prudently and ſeaſonably done; If they ſtill halt between Vertue and Vice, and are ſo fond of the thing, as to ſport upon the very confines of it; and ſhew that their proceeding no further, is more the effect of Intereſt, and Neceſſity, than ſincere Piety and Choice; and laſtly, If their Example do any way countenance it, and not rather diſplay its Deformity, and deceitful Diſguiſes; and, by repreſenting Godlineſs in all its Luſtre, render that more inviting, and lovely; and Sin more odious to the World. Thoſe who do not endeavour all this are not entirely devoted to Chriſt, nor true Children of Light; but have ſtill a Tenderneſs for, and hold a private Correſpondence with *the Works of Darkneſs*. And how deſtructive ſuch double

dealing will be in the End, how reaſonable our Averſions to thoſe Works are, and all, even the moſt ſevere, proofs, that can be required to demonſtrate the truth of our Hatred, and to make good our Engagements againſt them; I hope will ſoon appear to you, by a brief conſideration of my Third Particular, *viz.*

III. The reaſon of avoiding theſe *works of Darkneſs*, which the Text hath couched here, by calling them *Unfruitful*. It is not without great Elegance, and particular good reaſons, that the Luſts and Practices of Sinners are ſo frequently in Scripture ſtyl'd *Works*; for This implies the Toil and Drudgery of them, and intimates to us, what ſad experience wou'd teach too late, that no man can be very wicked, without much Labour, and great Vexation. The diſtracting Cares and Intereſts of Ambition and Covetouſneſs; the Violence and Tyranny of raging Paſſions, and inordinate Deſires; which hurry men into Anger, and Revenge, and Injuſtice, and Uncleanneſs, and all manner of Exceſs, cannot but be inconſiſtent with eaſe and pleaſure. For they impoſe more mercileſs

cileſs Tasks upon a man, and put him upon more dangerous, and more extravagant Attempts, than the moſt arbitrary Tyrant, or the Crueleſt Enemy, cou'd invent for his Captive, or his Slave. And he that has once reſign'd up the Government of himſelf to the furious and wild Suggeſtions of the Tempter, and his own rebellious Appetites, muſt make no more Pretenſions to Freedom and Satisfaction; He has bid adieu to all that can give him any, and does in the higheſt ſenſe of the words verify our Lord's obſervation. * *Whoſoever committeth Sin is the Servant of Sin.* * Joh. VIII. 34.

And how hard a ſervice that muſt needs be, I leave every one to judge, when he finds it deſcrib'd * *by a dark and ſlippery path; by mens wearying themſelves to work iniquity, walking through dangerous places; and labouring in the very fire.* * Wiſd. V. 7. Jerem. IX. 5. Habak. II. 13.

If ſuch then be the Pains and Wearisomneſs; If ſuch the Hazards and Difficulties, that attend the *Work*, it will become us very ſeriouſly to conſider, what it is we lay our ſelves out upon; and whether the Profits will at laſt anſwer the trouble: And of

This too, the Scriptures give us a true, but a lamentable account; * by aſſuring us, that ſuch men *weary themſelves for vanity, and a thing of nought*, that they *ſpend their labour for that which ſatisfieth not; that their years are conſumed in trouble; and all their works unfruitful.*

*Habak. II. 13. Iſaiah LV. 2.

And what a miſerable thing is this now? For a man to look back upon a life, ſo ill, ſo uneaſily ſpent; and find it turn to no advantage at all? To reflect what crooked and rough paths he has travelled through, what a deal of Sweat and Strength it has coſt him, to obey the Commands of a Maſter, who will never conſider him for his pains? How often his mind has been tortured and perplexed with unlawful deſires, and anxious fears; How he has been rackt to gratify his Luſt, or his Pride, his Avarice or Revenge; How he has ſacrificed all his content and calmneſs of mind, all his reſt and quiet enjoyment of himſelf and the world to theſe Paſſions; and when he comes at laſt to ſit down, and Compute his gains, to find that all his hopes have been deceitful, and all his Labours vain; And, inſtead of ſuch a Summ as might recompence

compence his paſt ſufferings, to find that Sarcaſm of St. *Paul's* underwritten at the foot of the Account; and his conſcience, after being long deluded with the expectations of I know not what imaginary Happineſs, turn again upon him with a * *What fruit have you had in all theſe things?* or thoſe words of the Preacher, *What profit hath he that laboureth for the Wind?*

* Rom. VI. 21. Eccleſ. V. 16.

This renders the Caſe bad enough in reaſon, and puts the Folly of ſuch, as employ themſelves in *Works of Darkneſs*, paſt all Queſtion, and beyond all Excuſe. And therefore to men, who have not abandon'd all Conſideration, it is diſcouragement enough in conſcience to call them *Unfruitful*. Not that they are ſtrictly without any fruit, but becauſe what follows upon them, is a great deal worſe than if there were none at all, and therefore ſaid to be *none*, becauſe it brings no advantage. For the Holy Spirit has foretold expreſly elſewhere, what will be the end of all ſuch labours. * That *Woe ſhall be to him who enticeth his Neighbour to Sin*; That *Envy is the Rottenneſs of the bones.*

* Habak. II. 16. Prov. XIV. 30.

Eccleſ. IV, V, VI. Covetouſneſs and Ambition a *perpetual vanity and Vexation.* That Pride goes before Deſtruction. And in more general terms ſtill. That *they who ſow to the fleſh, ſhall of the fleſh reap Corruption.* That to *wilful Sinners there remains a certain fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation.* That the effect of *Sin is ſhame*, and *the end and wages of it is Death.* That *to them who obey not the truth, but obey unrighteouſneſs, God ſhall render Indignation and wrath, tribulation and Anguiſh, upon every Soul of man that doth Evil.* That the Sinner's puniſhment ſhall be *Everlaſting*, and his portion in a place *of weeping, and wailing, and gnaſhing of teeth*; even in a Lake of *everlaſting fire*, even in a fire *prepar'd for the Devil and his Angels.*

Chap. Prov. XVI. 18. Gal. VI. 8. Heb. X. 27. Rom. VI. 21, 23. Rom. II. 8, 9. Matth. XXV. 46. XXIV. 51. XXV. 41.

And now, after this account of the Sinners Recompence for all his Labour and Trouble, there cannot, one would think, need any long Application, to perſwade us to act, like perſons ſenſible of what has been already delivered under the foregoing heads, and of our engagements with regard to them. Which was the IVth and laſt thing I propoſed, and

that

that I ſhall diſpatch as briefly as may be.

1. Now That which I ſhall draw from the *firſt* head, and the Contemplation of the *Works of Darkneſs*, is, *The Reaſonableneſs of our being extreamly well ſatisfied with our Duty, and heartily thankful for the benefits of the Goſpel.* For the more we conſider the *Darkneſs* of thoſe Ages in which our Fore-fathers lived, the better we ſhall diſcern the happineſs of our own. When men, advanced ſo far in Wiſdom and Vertue, ſuch as *Socrates*, and *Cato*, and ſome others, whom Antiquity always names with reſpect and admiration, had yet the misfortune of great Errours both in their Judgment and Practice; This is a manifeſt Evidence, how neceſſary ſome farther Revelation of the Divine Will was to mankind, how unable Nature and Reaſon are, even when moſt refin'd and improv'd, to diſcover all thoſe Rules, which are requiſite for the due Government of our ſelves. And all this contributes to the illuſtrating God's mercies to Chriſtians ſo much the more, when the things that were then unſearchable, are now ſo clear

clear and plain, that even *Babes* may apprehend, and *He that runs may read them.* All the Diſguiſes of Vice are now pulled off, its natural Deformities laid bare, its abſurdity and Inconſiſtence with the Chriſtian's Principles demonſtrated, its wretched Conſequences plainly forewarn'd. The Beauties of Vertue, and all its engaging Advantages are fairly ſet before us; And nothing now is wanting, that can in reaſon be deſired, either to convince our Judgments, or to charm our Affections. All which muſt certainly perſwade us, that the Condemnation of thoſe men muſt needs be very Juſt, muſt needs be very Great, who do not rejoice in this *Light*, and uſe it ſincerely; Who do not endeavour the performance of what is ſo agreeable to the dignity of their Nature, ſo ſecure of leading them in the beſt way to happineſs, ſo eaſy, and ſo delightful; with a *Contented* ſhall I ſay? No, that's too little, and too low a Character; but with a *Chearful*, and a *Thankful*, mind.

2. From the *Second* head, which explained what Teſtimonies are expected of our *having no Fellowſhip with the*

the Works of Darkneſs, I wou'd urge in general a *Continual Watch, and holy Jealouſy over our ſelves.* Where every complyance with Sin is not only Diſobedience, but Treachery; and where the Danger, and the Diſpleaſure ſuch offences incur, are ſo dreadful, no care can be enough. And if we wou'd but once be made ſenſible, how Cunning our great Enemy of Souls is, to turn every thing into an occaſion of Sin; We ſhou'd walk like men in the midſt of Traps and Snares, or upon Rocks and narrow Precipices. There is no truſting of our ſelves too near the Cockatrices Den; no playing upon the hole of the Aſp, if we expect to be ſafe; the beſt ſecurity is keeping at a diſtance, that we may have leiſure to look about us; and either flee betimes, and eſcape the Temptation; or be prepared for reſiſting it, when it ſhall overtake us. But whatever it is that leads into Sin, or has by experience been already found to endanger our falling into it; The man who indulges himſelf in that thing, ſets open the door, and invites the Devil to come in; He awakens and aſſiſts the wicked Spirit againſt

againſt himſelf; and is ſo perverſely officious in his own ruine, that this man does in a manner Tempt the very Tempter.

3. But *Thirdly*; my Laſt particular enforces both the other Inferences, For the more Juſt, to be ſure, are our Thanks and Joy for being delivered from *Darkneſs*, the more Neceſſary and Reaſonable our exceeding great Care to avoid the *works* of it, if thoſe works are, as I have ſhew'd them to be, *Unfruitful*. And therefore all I ſhall add upon this head, is what the Prophet call'd upon the *Jews* ſo earneſtly for. * *Remember this and ſhew your ſelves men; bring it again to mind O ye Tranſgreſſors.*

* Iſaiah XLVI. 8.

Be not ſo raſh and giddy, but allow your ſelves the benefit of a Second thought. Conſider what is to be propos'd from Sin, before you commit it; Think, O think betimes, how ſhort, how poor, how low, the enticing Pleaſures of it are; The Soothings of Senſe for a moment, or the imperfect and uncertain enjoyment of things which no man can promiſe himſelf the continuance of, no not an hour. A *Laughter* it may be indeed, but

but a Laughter in *the midſt of which the heart is ſorrowful*; and a Taſt of Honey in the mouth, ſure to be turned to Gall in the Stomach. And when you have weighed all theſe in a juſt ballance, and paſs'd a true and impartial Eſtimate upon them, you will then confeſs them at the beſt but Unprofitable and Vain, and that they who ſell themſelves to work wickedneſs, *ſell themſelves for nought.*

But ſtill they *ſell themſelves*; (if that can be a proper term, where no price is paid) that is, They part with that propriety and government God and nature have given them, to every eager and enticing Luſt; to every trifle of a Temptation; nay to the Enemy of mankind, to be *taken captive* and diſpos'd of *at his Will.* They caſt away their Soul, the nobleſt work of God's hand here below; on which he has ſtampt his Image, and made it immortal. That Jewel of ineſtimable worth, which the *whole world* is too cheap an Exchange for, and was therefore thought worthy the purchaſe of the blood of God himſelf. And muſt theſe Treaſures be ſo laviſhly ſquandered away? Muſt what has once coſt Matth. XVI. 26.

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ſo dear, be alienated for no benefit, no Conſideration at all? None did I ſay? moſt happy were it if there were none. *Bring it again to mind, therefore O ye Tranſgreſſors.* Sit down and ask your ſelves, whether you wou'd be content to give your perſons away for ſo little, to the perplexity of falſe Hopes, and inmoderate Deſires, and confounding Fears; to the Miſgivings of Guilt, and the amazing Agonies of a wounded Conſcience; to forced Diſeaſes and untimely Deaths; to the Horrours of Deſpair at your Laſt hour, and when that hour is paſt, to certain and eternal Damnation; the Vengeance of a God never to be appeaſed, and the Torments of a fire never to be quenched. *Remember this therefore O ye Tranſgreſſors, and ſhew your ſelves men*; for Otherwiſe you cannot be Men. While you purſue Death, and court Sorrow and Ruine; while for a Dream, a Shadow, a mere Nothing, You are even pleaſed to throw away the moſt precious Subſtance in the world, you quite unman your ſelves, and forfeit all pretenſions to the Character of reaſonable Creatures.

Good

Good God! How strange, and yet how common is this Infatuation! that carries men thus away, in despight of all reason, in despight of Religion, and (which in other Cases seldom fails to moves us) in despight of all Interest too to the Contrary. Let us at last (my Brethren) think it high time to recover our Souls from this strong Possession, to restore our selves to Consideration and Thought, to reflect upon our Advantages, and act for the future as becomes Men. Men that are thankful for God's mercies, desirous to answer the intent of them to our selves, zealous for his Honour, and our own benefit; mindful of our most reasonable Engagements; and therefore most reasonable, because they bind us to forsake such *works* only as are *unfruitful*. And in order to this, we shall do well to add our Prayers to our Resolutions and Endeavours, and continually to beg God's assistance, as the Church has instructed us to do in her Collect for the 3d *Sunday* after *Easter*, with which I conclude this Discourse.

Almighty

Almighty God; who ſheweſt to them that be in errour the Light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of Righteouſneſs; Grant unto all them that are admitted into the fellowſhip of Chriſt's Religion, that they may eſchew thoſe things that are contrary to their profeſſion, and follow all ſuch things as are agreeable to the ſame, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SERMON

SERMON III.

THE *Mercy and Justice of God* In distributing GOSPEL-ADVANTAGES.

St. Matth. XX. 9, 10.

When They came that were hired about the Eleventh hour, they received every man a Penny.

But when the First came, they supposed that They should have received more: and They likewise received every man a Penny.

MY Text is part of a Parable, made use of by our Blessed Saviour to illustrate that Saying, which concludes the Nineteenth Ch. XIX. 30.

teenth, and is again repeated in This
XX. 16. Chapter. *Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.* By which is signified the Method, by which God thinks fit to proceed, in imparting to mankind the Advantages and Rewards of the Gospel. And the Image our Lord chooses to represent it by, is This.

Vers. 1. A Master of a Family is here described using great diligence to *hire Labourers into his Vineyard*, and taking them into his Service at different
Vers. 2. times of the Day. With those who were received early he makes a positive Agreement for a determinate
Vers. 4. 7. Summ. To the Rest, who went in later, he promises in general Terms a Reward reasonable and fit for them. In the Evening, when these Work-
Vers. 8. men were brought together to receive their Wages, They who had wrought but a little while, were first called; and had as much given them, as Those who laboured the whole Day had covenanted for. This raised the Expectations of the Early Workmen, not doubting, but a Master so bountiful for the Service of One Hour, but a Few hours, would not fail in pro-

portion

portion to advance Their Wages too. But, to their great Astonishment and Indignation, the Steward is commanded to let them have their just Hire, and no more. And the Payment made to these two sorts of Labourers, so distant from what they both looked for, is what the Words now read take express notice of. *When they came who were hired about the Eleventh hour*, &c.

The Scope and End of this whole Similitude seems to be Two-fold, *viz. To check the Vanity of Some who may value themselves upon having been long in the Vineyard*; *and To encourage and sustain Others who might entertain but feeble hopes of Recompence, from their being called in at the latter end of the Day.* Such Passages therefore, as strictly answer this End are the substantial and necessary parts of the Parable, and ought to be strictly attended to. The rest we need not be very nice about, but may consider them only as Circumstances, inserted to make the Resemblance more beautiful and moving. The Applications of this Parable, must likewise be suited to the main design of it: and the

Doctrines deduced from thence such as carry an exact agreement with, and are the natural Result of, that Design. Of these the Principal seem to lye within the compass of my Text, which propounds to our Consideration the *Justice* and the *Mercy* of God, in rewarding his Servants under the Gospel-Covenant. *Mercy* to Them, who receive *the Penny*, notwithstanding they were hired but *at the Eleventh hour*: Yet this, without any derogation to his *Justice* towards them who receive no more, notwithstanding they came into the Work sooner.

These are the Points I have undertaken to treat of from the Words. And in order hereunto, it will only be needful to premise, that by *The Kingdom of Heaven* I understand the dealings of God with Mankind under the Christian Dispensation. Calling us to the Faith and Obedience of his Blessed Son, who rules in our hearts and administers the Kingdom of Grace here; and rewarding that Faith and Obedience in Heaven, where he shall reign in the Kingdom of Glory hereafter. So that by the Wages, or the *Penny* is chiefly meant that Eternal

Eternal Happiness awarded to Good men in the next World; Not excluding but implying, in Subordination to that future Recompence, all the Benefits and Privileges of the Christian Religion, which lead on toward that Triumphant State, while as yet the Church is Militant in this World.

There are but Two sorts of Application necessary to be taken notice of; because all the rest, which Learned men have thought upon, will, I think, either be comprehended under these, or may, by Parity of Reason, be deduced from them.

The First *is That, which supposes this Parable to proceed, as in truth most of our Saviour's Parables do, upon a Comparison between the* Jews *and* Gentiles.

The Second *brings it home to particular Christians; and accommodates this whole Matter to the Age of Man, and the several Stages of our Lives.*

Now to render my present Discourse as full and satisfactory as I am able, I shall take in both these Senses; and

will endeavour to shew, that the giving to every *Labourer a Penny*; that is, making the *Gentiles* equal with the *Jews*, and *late Penitents* equal with more *early Converts*, as this Parable, when duly observed, represents the matter to us; that these Proceedings, I say, are neither of them any just Reflection upon the Righteousness of God, and that his Bounty and Mercy are eminently magnified in Both.

I. *I begin with his Mercy.*

Some by the several Hours mentioned here, have understood the several Ages of the World. So as that *Hiring Labourers early in the Morning* should allude to the Revelations God made of himself to the Fathers before the Floud. The *Third hour*, to his calling *Abraham* and the *Patriarchs* out of the Corruptions of Idolatry. The *Sixth* to the Institution of the Law promulged by *Moses*. The *Ninth* to the Prophetick Age. And the *Eleventh* or Close of the Day, to That dispensation, which is the Last men are ever to expect, the Gospel of Christ. But these are Niceties, upon which no great Stress need be laid. For all our Saviour seems to have intended by distinguish-

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ing the time after this manner, is only to express himself according to the Custom of the *Jews*. Who began to reckon their Day from Sun-rising, and parcell'd out the Whole into Four Watches or Divisions: At the beginning of Three of these, and once more at the last hour, the Lord of the Vineyard renews his Call, and takes in as many as were ready, and willing to come.

By This, no doubt, we are given to understand, that God has done all that became him toward men's Conversion. He called when he was under no obligation; He sought Them who enquired not after Him; He did not only go out early to seek them; but he repeated his Invitations. And, though the Excuse made at the Sixth Verse is not expressly refuted, nor were they who urged it rejected, yet we cannot certainly infer, that this was admitted as a just and sufficient Plea. They of the *Eleventh hour* were indeed *idle, because no man had hired them*; but still, might it not be their own fault, that they were not hired sooner? For the same Master went out to seek them before; He

came to the *Market*, the place whither Labourers usually resorted, and where they ought to have been ready to offer themselves; and as many as were then present, and did accept his Service he kindly retained. So that this Passage seems to stop the mouths, not of *Jews* only, but of all pretended Christians too, who complain, that they want means and opportunities for becoming the men they ought to be. For this delay is very often too manifestly their own Fault. Opportunities have been put into their hands, and let slip through their own Sloth and Negligence. The Lord of the Vineyard sought them sooner, but they were not found. And in this case, the Blame will return at last upon their own want of Care, and of more early Preparation. For had those who came in at the *Sixth*, and *Ninth*, and *Eleventh* hours, been there at the *First* and *Third*, we have reason to think they had been hired then; At least they had done their parts. But nothing less than being up at the earliest hour can acquit them from the Imputation of Idle and Sluggish Servants.

Not

Not but that God does herein differ greatly from any Master of a Vineyard, that his Bounty and Condescensions are infinitely greater, and peculiar to Himself alone. He *waits over men's Souls continually to do them good:* He does not only call, but he disposes our minds to hearken to, and comply with that Call; and in his merciful Providence times his Calls so, that they shall be repeated at Seasons most favourable, and when we are best prepared to obey them. These are the Methods of his abundant Grace, and as such they are to be received. For, as those *Labourers* could have no just complaint against the *Housholder*, supposing him to have gone but once into the *Market*, because it was their duty to have been ready then; but it was great kindness to employ them afterwards: So, when Almighty God hath once made sufficient tenders of Salvation, and we have neglected them; if we perish, the Fault is our own. But if, notwithstanding our Backwardness and unprepared hearts, those Offers be repeated to us again and again: This is not Debt but Favour; not an act of Justice, but the free

Isa. XXX. 18.

Effect

Effect of his unspeakable and exuberant Goodness.

Thus much however must in reason be allowed, that the more Opportunities of this kind have been formerly let go, and the more voluntary those Neglects have been, the greater must the Condemnation of those men needs be, who have stood out against them, or not put themselves in the way of them before: And the greater is the Mercy, which admits such into Grace at the last Call, and passes by all their former Contempts. And yet This will most assuredly be done upon their Complyance even then. For God does by no means intend to mock men by any of his Invitations, He makes them with a kind intent, He considers, more exactly than we are capable of doing, what advantages each person hath had, and what he hath wanted; what Hindrances have kept him off so long; and why One Call is more successful than Another.

We may say then with great Truth, concerning these Spiritual Dispensations, what *David* did of God's Providence in our Temporal Affairs, that

his

his Goodneſs ſtandeth like the ſtrong Mountains. This is highly exalted, and eminently viſible to all the world: but *his Judgments are like the great Deep:* Vaſt and Dark, and ſuch as Mortal Eyes cannot ſee through. Yet is not this Depth ſo abſolutely impenetrable neither, but that we may enter ſo far into it as is neceſſary for our preſent purpoſe. We may know enough to juſtify God in his Dealings, though we cannot go to the bottom of his infinitely Wiſe and Myſterious Counſels. And therefore, having ſhewed the *Mercy* of God's receiving any manner of men into his Vineyard and Pay. Pſal. XXXVI. 6.

II. *I come now to conſider the Juſtice of his making Them equal in the wages, who are thus unequally received into the Work.* Which indeed is the only Difficulty in the Caſe. For we do not find the Goodneſs of this *Houſholder* ever brought in queſtion: So far from That, that the Exceſs of it was reckoned injurious: And the *Firſt Labourers* thought their Maſter *evil* and hard upon Them, becauſe he was ſo bountiful, ſo ſeemingly Over-good, to thoſe who came into the Vineyard laſt.

Now

Now in order to our better discerning this matter, we will briefly state the Difference between these sorts of Labourers in the Parable, according to the Applications usually made of it; and then examine what account can be given of this surprising distribution of Rewards in their several Cases.

The *Jews* bear proportion to *Labourers hired early*, for They had long submitted to a Religion instituted by God, a Law clogg'd with rigorous Ordinances, and very troublesome Observations. In this respect they might truly be said to *have born the burden and heat of the Day*. But the *Gentiles* had wrought their own Wills, lived all along in Ignorance and Idolatry, Luxury and Lasciviousness, and yet These too had the tenders of the Gospel and Eternal Life made to them. And as many as embraced those Offers were vested in a Title to the Kingdom of Heaven; A Title equal with those *Jews*, who had lived under a severe confinement, and born the heavy Yoke of the *Mosaick* Institution.

Verſ. 12.

So again. The Apostles and first Christians came in to the Gospel at their

their utmost peril and expence. Their Fortunes, their Fame, their Liberties, their Lives, were the purchase paid for their Faith. And yet the same Kingdom of Heaven is opened for sincere Believers of all After-ages: though the times they live in be peaceable, the Encouragements to Christianity secular, and all the heat of publick Persecution extinct and over.

Thus as to particular Persons. Some are *trained up* from Children *in the way they should go, and when they are old, they do not depart from it.* Prov. XXII. 6. They conquer and quench the irregular heats of Youth and Passion betimes, and, as much as the frailty of humane nature will allow, do *keep themselves unspotted from the world.* Jam. I. 27. Others *rejoyce, and let their heart chear them in their Youth, they walk in the ways of their own heart, and in the sight of their own Eyes, till the Evil days come, and the Years in which they can no longer have pleasure*; Eccles. XI. 9. XII. 1. and yet if even then they *remember their Creator* he shews himself *merciful and gracious, slow to anger and of great Goodness*; Joel II. 12. And though it be late, yet if it be sincerely and effectually, that they come back

to

to their duty, he opens his arms wide to embrace the returning Prodigals, pardons their long disobedience, saves their Souls, and bestows upon them a Glorious and Eternal Recompence.

And *lastly*, (which proceeds upon the same measures) They who have their Days shortned, and are cut off in the midst of their Age, if they dye in Innocence, or in early and promising Vertue, are entitled to Happiness, in common with Others, who live long, and glorify God by much Labour and Suffering, and through severe Tryals, and great Hardships, enter at last into the Kingdom of Heaven.

These several Cases the Importance of the Parable may very reasonably be extended to; and I must try now to reconcile those Doubts, which so great a Disproportion of Persons and Circumstances may be apt to suggest to us: and must shew, if I can, that whatever we may think of the matter, still the Judge of all the Earth in giving this *penny* to each of them, does nothing but right. And throughout this whole Disquisition I shall make use chiefly, if not altogether, of such Argu-

Arguments, as the Parable it ſelf furniſhes either plain ground for, or at leaſt very fair Intimations of.

1. Now, *Firſt* of all, We may obſerve ſome difference taken notice of in the Parable, *between theſe Labourers themſelves*; and that, partly *before*, and partly *after* their work. The *Firſt* drove a poſitive bargain, and agreed expreſly for a *Penny a Day*: They who came later, were content to ſtand to their Maſter's Courteſy, and undertook the work upon this general Promiſe, that *whatſoever was right that they ſhould receive.* And again, when the Toil and Duty was over, Theſe Laſt received their Pay with Thankfulneſs and Decency; but the Former with Murmurings and ſawcy Expoſtulations; envying their Brethren's good Acceptance, and boldly arraigning their Lord's Juſtice. Verſ. 2. Verſ. 4. 7.

2. The ſame is to be ſaid of thoſe Perſons, to whom this Parable is generally ſuppoſed to refer; and many Qualifications are obſervable in Them, which might move God to govern his Diſtributions by the ſame Meaſures here too. The *Jews* were under the conſtant direction of his Laws, but then they were

Grot. in loc.

were of a slavish and mercenary Disposition; Driven by present Punishments, and encouraged by Temporal Blessings. Prosperous Successes of this Life were litterally indented for, and whatever they received, they look'd upon it as a Debt. Whereas the *Gentiles*, on the contrary, were under no such former Covenant; These, when called into the *Vineyard*, threw themselves at their Lord's feet, closed with the Gospel upon his own Terms, stood entirely to His Goodness; went chearfully to work, and were content with the prospect of distant and unseen Rewards: and whatever was given Them, they received it as the effect of Grace and great Beneficence. And this may very well be admitted for one good Consideration, to recommend them to more favour.

Again, We must remember, that the Value of any Service or Obedience rises, in proportion to the Difficulties and Disadvantages, which the Person breaks through to pay it. And this presents us with another mighty Disparity in the Case now under debate. The *Jews* had been breed up in a Religion, which had little else in it, but

Shadows

Shadows and Figures of the Christian dispensation. They had heard the Voice of the Prophets every day, and were well acquainted with the Testimony of Miracles, by which our *Jesus* proved his Mission and Messiahship. The Moral Law was likewise an excellent preparation for those Doctrines of higher Perfection, which the Gospel built upon it; And the Knowledge of the true God, and his former Revelations, made the passage more easy for the Mysteries of the Christian Faith. For persons therefore thus qualified to come in to the Preaching and the Church of Christ, was no more than might in reason be expected, and They, who did it not, were justly reprobated, as past all Excuse. But it was no less surprising, on the other hand, that the *Gentiles*, who knew very little of God before, and had run greedily into all manner of Impurity and Excess, should on a sudden make so brave a Stand. That They should at once renounce all their polluted Worship, and Licentious Conversation, and conform to the Precepts of a most Holy Religion; That They, who in former Ages were utter

Strangers to the true God, should receive the Word of God Incarnate, at a time, when he *came to his Own* Family, *and his Own received him not.* But above all, This was a most amazing instance of their Sincerity and marvellous Zeal, that Men, who lived so much in the dark about the Immortality of the Soul, and who absolutely denyed the Resurrection of the Body, should with such Alacrity forego the Enjoyments of the present world, and stake down their very Lives, for a Crown to be obtain'd after Death; In a State, of which they had never known, scarce ever heard any thing at all before.

John I. 11.

The Condition of Late Penitents is thus far the same; that They too attain to a through Reformation, and a Godly Life very hardly. For Habits of the Mind, and especially Vicious ones, are not vanquish'd without much Labour, and many sharp Disputes. The power of Custom is exceeding great; but in Wicked practices the Difficulty is doubled, because there Corrupt Nature strikes in, and Custom is strengthened by Inclination. All the Advances that a Man thus fallen can make, are

are so many Violences committed upon himself. And the bringing the Byas of Sensual Appetite to draw true, working the Soul to a Distaste of unlawful Gains and Pleasures, and making ones self a *New Heart*, and a *New Spirit*, are long and laborious Undertakings. Such they are indeed, as nothing but Experience can give us any just notion of; Unknown to those happy men, who have always preserved their good Principles, and never drunk of Vice, nor tasted its intoxicating Pleasures. These have nothing to do, but to proceed: to maintain their ground, and advance smoothly, as new opportunities of Improvement shall offer, and the sensible Delights of Holiness quicken them up to it. And if the God of Mercy be gracious to this constant and sedate Piety, where every thing is agreeable and inviting, shall he not extend his Bowels of Compassion, to Them also, who serve him in Tears, and Groans, in bitter Remorse and earnest Prayers? Will he despise the Terrours and Confusions, the Sorrows and Reproaches of a self-condemning Breast? No, no. He will behold such Anguish with

Pity, and assist the Pangs and Strugglings of this Second Birth: It is an act becoming his Fatherly tenderness, his essential Goodness, and Wisdom, and Justice, to make those gallant Combatants Triumphant hereafter, whom nothing less than an undaunted Zeal, and a powerful Faith, long time, indefatigable pains, and invincible Resolution, could ever have rendred Victorious over Sin here. And upon the account, that such a mighty Change argues a noble Disposition; a Change, which none but Great and Generous Souls have the Courage to go through with; Upon this account, I say, probably it is, that our Blessed Saviour declares elsewhere, *There is more Joy in Heaven over one Sinner that repenteth, than over ninety and nine Just Persons, that need no Repentance*, i. e. This Alteration is not only more sensible, but in some respects more acceptable, more commendable, than an easy uninterrupted course of steady and always successful Vertue; which never felt the dangers, nor lay under the Discouragements, of former defeats, and an insulting Conqueror to rally and make head against, with forces

Luke XV. 7. 10. Chrysost. Tom. 5. Serm. 52. Pag. 353. Ed. Eton.

forces often beat, and miserably broken.

2. But, *Secondly*. The Parable observes another Difference between these *Labourers, after the Work was over*; *That*, They who were hired late received their pay with all due Humility and Thankfulness, but those that came in early, with Repining and Indignation. *They murmured against the Good man of the House* (says the Verse next after my Text) This Passage St. *Chrysostom* will by no means allow us to understand strictly and literally. It being a contradiction to all our Notions of Heaven, that any grumbling or envious Disposition should be admitted thither: And therefore he looks upon it, as a Circumstance of the Parable purely Ornamental, and set to signify so great a degree of Happiness, as would naturally provoke our Envy in this World. And thus, no doubt, with regard to the Recompence of another Life we are obliged to take it: But yet (as he observes withal) there is a great deal both of Energy and Truth, in this Expression, so far as the Parable concerns the Calling in of the *Gentiles*. For nothing

Chrys. in loc. T. 2. Serm. 64. Pag. 408.

is more remarkable, than the implacable Malice and proud Spight of the *Jews*, upon this occasion; Which carried them to such an Excess, as even to refuse Salvation, and think it beneath their acceptance, if they must have it in common with other despised Nations. This is manifestly the Fault our Saviour aimed at here; and it is that, which many persons, of lives unblameable for the main, are, in all ages, guilty of. An over-valuing of their own Righteousness, and a thinking Scorn, (with that *Elder Brother* in the Parable) that Returning *Prodigals*, Wretches once profligate and infamous, should have an equal place in their Heavenly Father's Love.

Luke XV. 28, 29, 30.

But now the *Gentiles* formerly, and many reform'd Sinners since, have endeared themselves particularly to Almighty God, by their deep Humility and Meekness of Spirit, by resembling Him in a most extensive Charity, a generous Largeness of Heart, which fills them with unfeigned Joy at the Recovery of their once lost, and to all appearance desperate, Brethren, inclines them to delight in the Happiness of all mankind, and to esteem their

their own more exalted, when the Mercy of God is magnified, and the number of his Blessed Saints increased.

3. *Thirdly.* It is very probable there may be Another Difference, not less considerable than either of the Former; and that is a *Difference in the Work it self.* The Parable indeed is silent in this particular, perhaps for a Reason which I shall mention hereafter: But some *Jewish* Fables very like this, reply thus to the murmuring Servants, *This man hath the hire of a Day because he hath in two hours done the work of a whole Day.* Thus much however is certain in the Subject before us, that the *Gentiles* are frequently commended, for excelling in Zeal, and in the Graces of Christianity, doing things to their utmost, nay even *beyond their power*, and fired by a generous Emulation to *come behind* the *Jews* in no Vertue. Thus also upon Repentance from a very dissolute Life, we often observe men act with double Vigour, and indefatigable Diligence; sadly sensible of the Time they have lost, and impatient to redeem it by the best improvement of that little they have left; desirous to make Religion

See *Hammond* here Note *b*.

2 Cor. VIII. 3. 1 Cor. I. 7.

some amends for the injury and dishonour they have done it formerly, and to give the world satisfaction for the Scandal of an ill Example, by setting one as eminently good, and being for the future the very Reverse of what they were before. And that this is the natural Consequence of breaking off from a wicked course, is plain from our Saviour's discourse upon washing his feet; where he applies to the different behaviour of a Penitent Woman, and a proud Pharisee, that Parable of the two Debtors, which proves, that He who is most sensible of the Greatness of his Sins, and the Mercy of Forgiveness, will naturally love God most, and by all his actions give testimony that he does so.

Luke VII. 44, &c.

Thus St. *Paul* says in his own Vindication, that, though he was the *last*, and *least of the Apostles*, not *worthy* that name, because as one *born out of due time, and once a Persecutor of the Church of God*, yet *he laboured more abundantly than they all.* And in such a case, a man's Obedience will be measured, not by Length of Time, but by the Fervency of the Desire, and the Sincerity of the Heart. A few exalted

1 Cor. XV. 8, 9. 10.

acts

acts of Constancy and Piety may express a man's affection as effectually as many years practice; and in the balance of Equity weigh against a multitude of Others, where the Circumstances were not so trying. And God, who sees the Heart, judges us, not only by what we do, but by what we are ready and resolved to do, and would certainly accomplish, if we had opportunity. Thus Innocence or early Vertue may be crowned, not only for the little it hath done, but for the noble Fruits, which God foresees that generous Plant would bear, had not he for wise reasons cut it off, before it arrived to ripeness of Years and Judgment. Thus a Man, who is heartily disposed to continue faithful in despight of all hardship and suffering, may be considered for that habitual Steadiness of mind, no less than if God had brought the fiery Tryal upon him. And thus the Thief upon the Cross, by one Glorious Confession of Christ at his last hour, obtained remission of his whole pass'd wicked Life, and an entrance into Paradise that very day. Luke XXIII. 42, 43.

When

When I urge these Arguments, my meaning is only thus much. That This is oftentimes the Case, and that there is a great deal in the Reason and Nature of the thing, which should push on the Labourers who come in late, to exert and distinguish themselves in the works of Righteousness, and Charity, and a strict exemplary Conversation. So that an equal Reward is not supposed by this Particular, except there be an equal Vertue. But then this Vertue may be either apparent in the outward Acts, or it may be inward in the Disposition, which to God, who is the Judge and Rewarder, is all one; for He sees it, though Men do not. Where there is no such equality in the Persons, the Parable does not assert any equality in the Wages; for the Aphorism illustrated is not *All*, but *Many that are first shall be last*, and *the last, shall be first*, Or (as another Evangelist hath expressed it) *Behold there are Last which shall be First, and there are First which shall be Last.* Some *Gentiles*, (that is,) who have not the same advantages of Faith and a Good Life, will excel some *Jews*, who have greater;

Ch. XIX. 30.

Luk. XIII. 30.

ter: And Some late Penitents will outdo others of an early Piety: The Arrogant Righteous shall be degraded for their Envy and Spiritual Pride; And the Contrite, the Humble, the Charitable Convert shall be exalted and preferr'd: The Vertues conspicuous in one sort of these men being thus cast into Scales, against those which the Other have not, or have them in a less degree, or sully them with some Blemish or notable Imperfection.

Thus much for the *First* Reason arising from those Differences, which the Parable it self leads us to observe between the late and early Labourers. But it must be confess'd,

II. *Secondly*, That the Main Argument, and that wherein the Parable is most express, why this Proceeding cannot possibly be any imputation upon the *Justice* of Almighty God, is what we meet with here in answer to the grumbling Workmen, in the Conclusion of this Representation, *Friend,* Vers. 13, *I do thee no wrong. Didst not thou* 14, *agree with me for a Penny? Take that* 15. *is thine, and go thy way. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine Eye evil, because I am good?*

good? This Reply teaches us, *that* Eternal Life is at least a valuable (it is indeed an infinite and most disproportionate) Consideration, for the best and most laborious Services: *that* it is God's *own to do what he will with*, a free Gift even to Them who make good Their part. For it was his Mercy alone, which moved him to seek these Labourers; And admit them to so advantagious an Agreement. And we cannot be guilty of a vainer thought, nor cast a greater Blemish upon our good works, than to suppose Heaven due to them, as a strict and adequate Reward. To inculcate this notion of God's Bounty and free Grace the more, I take the mention of those Servants Work to be omitted, who were sent into the Vineyard in the declining of the Day. And not only so, but This shews us moreover, that, when We our selves are satisfied, and have all we can pretend to, it no way concerns Us how Other people are dealt with. Almighty God is Master of his own Favours, and when he does right and justice to All, though he should to Some give Over-measure, yet this cannot be any wrong

wrong to Them who have their Full measure. To find fault with our Lord's liberality in such distributions argues insufferable Insolence and Vanity; and would not be, were we but thoroughly possest with that modest opinion of our own performances, and that Grateful Sense of his Goodness, which is due to a God, of whose abundant and mere mercy it is, that even the Best men receive at least as much, in truth infinitely more than they ever did, or can deserve.

I beg your patience but one moment longer, while I deliver the Text from Two Erroneous Opinions, which unwary Readers may be apt to draw from it: And these are all the Inferences I shall raise from the foregoing Discourse.

1. And *First*, It cannot with any good reasoning be concluded from hence, that *the Rewards of all Good men in the next world are equal.* The Scripture manifestly prefers Some good works before Others, and it affirmstoo, that *God rewardeth every man according to his works.* It declares, that *He which soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly; and He which soweth bountifully, shall reap*

Matth. IX. 13. XII. 7. Psal. LXII. 12. 2 Cor. V. 10. 2 Cor. IX. 6.

reap bountifully. So then Both shall *reap*, because both have *sown*; but yet Each shall *reap*, in proportion to what Each hath *sown*. By the *Penny* here is meant Eternal Life, and the Happiness of all the Blessed shall be Eternal. The *Jews*, who receive and obey the Gospel, shall go to Heaven, and so shall the *Gentiles*. The men of constant Holiness shall go to Heaven, and so shall the sincere Penitents. The Martyrs shall be crowned, and so shall the Christians, who live well, and die in Peace. This is the utmost, that the Analogy of the Parable directs us to, that these several sorts of persons shall be Happy; and that the Happiness of them all shall never have an End. But, whether all their Crowns shall be equally bright, whether the Degrees of their Felicity shall be the same, is a Question foreign to our present purpose, and such as the Text is no way concern'd in. Nay, we are assured, both from Reason and Scripture, that they shall not. For, though all the *Righteous shall shine in the Kingdom of their Father*, yet St. *Paul*, in his discourse of the Resurrection and a Future State, hath

Matth. XIII. 43.

hath told us, that there too *One Star differeth from another Star in glory.* 1 Cor. XV. 41. Chrysost. in loc. & T. 5. Serm. 33. Pag. 212.

2. *Secondly.* The Favour shewed here to Them who were hired at the *Eleventh hour, is no encouragement for any man's delaying his Repentance, no not one Moment.* For, What is this *Eleventh hour?* Strictly and properly it is no doubt God's last Call to Mankind; and that Call is made in the Gospel; there being no other Religion to succeed in the place of this, No new Covenant, or more advantagious Terms in reserve, for Them who do not come in, and close with these. And though we should, (as we may conveniently enough) apply this to the Age of each particular Christian; Yet even thus it gives no countenance to the frivolous excuses of Slothful and Impenitent Sinners. For we do not read, that They who were *hired* then, had heard the Call sooner. The Parable is silent, as to the Causes of their Absence, and, though indeed it hints Idleness to have been at the bottom, yet it no where says, that there were Any present, at the *First*, and *Third*, and *Sixth*, and *Ninth* hours, who, after peremptorily

ptorily refusing to come in then, were called again, and received at the *Eleventh*. So that This does by no means come up to the Case of those obstinate and refractory, those unperswadeable and incorrigible Wretches, in whose Ears the Instructions and holy Importunities of God are continually sounding; and yet they harden themselves, and make it a point of wicked Bravery to turn the deaf Ear, and hold out against them. What reason can we assign then, why God should not give such people over to their own foolish perverse choice, by withdrawing his Grace, and leaving off those so long fruitless attempts to do them good?

But farther yet, supposing God not to be so far provoked, as to suffer his wrath to take place in this respect; yet, considering the Condition of humane Nature, and the Uncertainty of Life, why should we not look upon Every hour as our *Eleventh* hour? Each invitation to our happiness, may be the last that ever will be made us. Each Sermon, the last we may ever hear: Each Sacrament, the last we may ever be allowed to partake of. We can have no absolute Assurance that it shall not be

be so; and it would be our wisdom to behave our selves, as though we were assured it shall be so. But I forbear pursuing this Argument here, and refer my Reader for more full conviction to the next discourse. In the mean while it would well become every one of us, frequently and seriously to apply to his own Case, what our Blessed Lord once said of himself, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is Day*, because our Sun declines apace, *and the night cometh on, wherein no man can work.* Joh. IX. 4.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three Persons, and One God, be all Honour and Glory, for ever. Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE PENITENT THIEF

No Encouragement for a

Death-bed Repentance.

St. Luke XXIII. 42, 43.

And he ſaid unto Jeſus, Lord, remember me, when thou comeſt into thy Kingdom.

And Jeſus ſaid unto him, Verily I ſay unto thee, To day ſhalt thou be with me in Paradiſe.

MY Text is part of a Paſſage, very Remarkable, very Comfortable, very Inſtructive. But ſuch a one withal, as deſerves to be very carefully conſidered, becauſe other-

otherwiſe it may be abuſed to the worſt of purpoſes, and have that Encouragement, which it adminiſters to Grievous, provided they be ſincerely Penitent, Offenders, perverted into an occaſion of dangerous Security to the Habitual and Negligent Sinners. I ſhall therefore make it my buſineſs ſo to treat of this Thief upon the Croſs, received into Grace at his laſt hour, as to encourage all wicked men to Repentance; yet without flattering ſuch in a falſe and unreaſonable hope of finding God as eaſy to be reconciled to Them, who wilfully drive off the making their Peace with him till their laſt hour.

It might indeed be reaſonably expected, that ſeveral other very weighty and profitable points might have ſome place in a Diſcourſe upon this Subject. But That which I have more eſpecially in view, and the only one I ſhall inſiſt upon at preſent, is This. *That* This Example, when rightly underſtood, and equally weighed in all its Circumſtances, is no reaſonable ground for any man's deferring his Reformation one ſingle hour; much leſs than for depending upon a Death-

bed Repentance, to procure him Pardon and Salvation.

There are ſundry Arguments fetch'd from Reaſon and Scripture, which, if men would have the Patience to attend to ſeriouſly and impartially, could not, one would think, but prevail with them, to ſet about a Work, which even They, that excuſe themſelves from doing it in good earneſt, confeſs to be abſolutely neceſſary. But when they are preſſed to begin it ſpeedily, when We, whoſe Office and Duty oblige us, to call upon, and vehemently importune them to this ungrateful Undertaking, warn them how dangerous Delays are; how fatal in this, above any other Matter; They preſently take Shelter in the Inſtance of my Text, and are willing to think that Their Faults are leſs than thoſe of this Thief, and therefore they can ſee no reaſon, why their Repentance, though it come as late, ſhould not be altogether as ſucceſsful. Now in detecting this darling Impoſture, I cannot ſtay to urge a ſpeedy Repentance, from all the Topicks proper for that purpoſe; but muſt confine my ſelf within the Compaſs of this ſo much

abuſed

abuſed Example. And I ſhall be ſatisfied with hoping, that when once the Sinner is beaten from this hold, the other Arguments uſually produced to this purpoſe, will find him open to their force, and be able to make a Conqueſt of him.

And here, that we may bring the Matter to as quick and as fair an Iſſue as is poſſible, I am content for the preſent (to give up ſome things, which yet perhaps, were I diſpoſed to be tenacious, would not ſo eaſily be wreſted from me; and) to allow the Pretenſions for a Late and Death-bed Repentance, all the Advantages, which the Caſe before us can in any tolerable Conſtruction furniſh them with; As, for the purpoſe in theſe following Inſtances.

1. *Firſt*, Whereas ſome have thought it probable, that this Thief might have been guilty in One Fact only, which though the Laws of men take hold of, is yet in the Eye of God leſs offenſive, than long and wilful habits of Sins leſs ſcandalous in their own Nature; and that he might poſſibly have repented long before, of this Fact too, for which he was now put to Death;

I shall make no difficulty both to suppose that he was an old, habitual Sinner in other Instances, and to allow that his Conversion and Repentance were of no older date, than this publick Declaration of them mentioned by St. *Luke*. Nay, if you please, I will accept St. *Chrysostom*'s and St. *Jerome*'s Method of reconciling This with the other Evangelists; Which is, that this Thief also did at first joyn with his Fellow in reproaching and railing at Jesus; but that afterwards by our Lord's behaviour, and the many miraculous Appearances at his Passion, he was powerfully wrought upon, and presently changed as we see. And consequently his Acceptance with Christ must have proceeded from this sudden, this late, Conviction and Repentance. A Repentance begun, as well as finished, in the very Act of Death.

2. *Secondly*, Some have also represented this as an extraordinary and reserved Case, not to be drawn into Example by Others: As Acts of Clemency and Oblivion upon special Emergencies are no warrant for Subjects always to expect the like Impu-

nity

nity or Favour from their Prince. But I am willing to wave this Plea too. I will not put the Grace extended to this dying Malefactor upon God's Supreme Prerogative of Mercy, superseding the standing Measures of Government, as oft as he sees fit; but shall admit it for a common Standard and Universal Rule. So that All, who are under the same Circumstances with this Penitent Thief; may, by Virtue of the Gospel Covenant, promise themselves the same kind reception and full pardon for all the Sins though never so many, never so grievous, of their whole past profligate Life.

3. *Thirdly*, Whereas some have earnestly contended, that Repentance is a Change of Heart and Life both; and that, whatever it may appear, or be charitably hoped and supposed, yet in reality That is no Repentance, which does not prove its own Sincerity by a man's After-acts; I will satisfy my self in the present Argument, with that looser notion of the Word, which implies a Change of the Heart only. Consequently I must grant, that what is commonly (though some pretend very improperly) called a Death-bed

Repentance, may be a true Repentance; Becauſe, though a new Courſe of Life would be abſolutely neceſſary (did the perſon ſurvive) to teſtify the truth of it to Men, yet God, who knows the Heart, needs no ſuch Teſtimony. And, upon this Suppoſition, the Nature and Eſſence of Repentance will conſiſt in a Renewing of the Mind and Affections; and the Actions will not be ſo much a part of the thing it ſelf, as an Evidence and Demonſtration of the thing. Where Death then cuts off all Opportunities of giving ſuch proofs, we cannot upon theſe terms, conclude a man hath not repented, from his not being able to give Us this Proof of his Repentance.

I would not be miſtaken in this matter. I do not aſſert theſe things to be juſt as I have laid them, I do not take upon me to determine one way or other; But, I ſay, I am content for the preſent, to have them thought ſo; as deſiring to put the faireſt and moſt favourable State of the Caſe. And I do not ſee how any Sinner, who will condeſcend to reaſon at all upon this Example, can pretend to carry it farther, in favour of a Death-bed Repentance

tance, than I have now done. And yet after coming down thus to the Sinners own Terms, I hope, by God's aſſiſtance, to convince him, that even This Example, thus interpreted, is very far from bearing any man out in deferring his Repentance to his laſt, nay to the very next day.

Now Every one knows, that, in arguing from Precedents the ſtrength of what we urge depends altogether upon the Reſemblance of the Caſe we argue for, to that Other which we argue from. So far as Theſe two agree, the Reaſoning is good; but where they differ, there can be no Conſequence. And if there be any diſagreement between them, though but in One material Circumſtance, the Former caſe cannot be admitted for a ſufficient Rule or Warrant to the Latter. Since therefore the Argument I am now upon is entirely Precedent and Example, and all I deſign is to overthrow the falſe Supports, which men, loath to break with their Sins till they can keep them no longer, have formed to themſelves from this Inſtance of the Thief upon the Croſs; they ought certainly to give up all thoſe

those Encouragements for treacherous and unreasonable, if I can shew these Three things;

I. First, *That there were some Circumstances in Case of this Thief, to which that of no other man can ever be parallel.*

II. Secondly, *That, admitting we should come up to his Repentance, so far as it is imitable by us, yet none of us all can have the same Assurance of being pardoned and accepted. But, which is worst of all,*

III. Thirdly, *That it is equally Possible, nay indeed much more Probable, that, when we come to die,* His *Case may not be* Ours, *no not even in the very Disposition to repent.*

I. *First,* It deserves to be very attentively considered, *That there are some Circumstances in the Case of this Penitent Thief, to which the Condition of no other man* (but especially of no Christian, who deferrs his Repentance to a sick or dying Bed) *can possibly be parallel.*

Now in examining any of the surprising and unusual Acts of the Divine Mercy,

Mercy, we must be sure always to bring this Rule along with us, *That* Almighty God in the instances of his Love and Compassion is perfectly void of all that byas of Humour, and Passion, and Partial Fondness, which oftentimes are a Blemish to the Proceedings of easy and good-natur'd Men; that He constantly acts with such steadiness, as becomes Infinite Goodness, regulated and duly tempered with Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Justice. And consequently, that all his Dealings are strictly agreeable to Equity and Reason; Even those of them, which we are not able to enter so far into the Grounds of, as to account for them in every particular, to Our selves, or to Others.

Nor can it seem strange, that we should not be able to account for Many matters of this Nature, when we reflect, that the most equitable rule of proceeding, both with God and Man, is to regard the Intentions and Dispositions of the Persons concerned. Now these are things that lye too deep for any but the Searcher of Hearts, to have a distinct sight and entire knowledge of. And therefore

we

we ought always to conclude, that He, to whoſe view theſe things lie open, hath ſufficient motives which induce him to make a difference in favour of Some above Others. And ſuch difference, ſo far as we can judge, is made; as oft as They who in all appearance have done leſs, are made equal to thoſe who in all appearance have done more. For, though God in the riches of his mercy may give Every good man a greater reward than is due to his work, yet his Juſtice requires, that Each of theſe good men be conſidered in proportion to his work. And though the beſt of us all cannot in rigour deſerve Remiſſion of Sins, and Acceptance of our Labours; yet we may have ſuch Qualifications, as will not fail to diſpoſe him to paſs by our Faults, and to receive us graciouſly.

Again, The Worth and Efficacy of ſuch Qualifications is not always to be meaſured by the Length of Time, or by the number of Acts produced by them. Becauſe it may happen, that a very Few, or but One ſingle Inſtance may be ſo circumſtantiated, as to give teſtimony of a man's Sincerity and Zeal,

Zeal, equivalent to a Multitude of others. And this is what I need not labour either to prove, or to apply, in the preſent Queſtion. For all men muſt allow, that He, who, in Conſideration of Repentance and Faith at his laſt hour, is received preſently into Paradiſe, does, like *the Labourers of the Eleventh hour*, attain an equal reward with Them, who by a long, painful and conſtant Obedience, have born the burden and heat of the Day; And They who interpret that Parable in favour of ſuch a Repentance, alledge, that God accepts the dying Penitent for his Integrity and Zeal; that he looks upon what the man would have done, as if it had been actually done; and judges him according to the Deſires and good Diſpoſitions he had, and not according to the Opportunities he had not.

From theſe things thus premiſed, it plainly appears, that, in order to a right underſtanding, and fair Application of the Example now before us, it will be neceſſary to enquire very diligently into thoſe good Diſpoſitions of the Thief upon the Croſs, which might reaſonably be ſuppoſed to recommend

commend him to Mercy, at his Death, notwithstanding the grievous Offences of his past wicked Life. And, to any person who shall set himself seriously to consider this matter, this Relation of St. *Luke*, and the Case, as now stated, will sufficiently intimate these Two especially.

1. *First*, Great Ingenuity of Temper, and Readiness of Mind to embrace the Faith of Christ, so soon as sufficient means of Conviction were afforded him. 'Tis highly probable, this man had never known any thing of *Jesus* before, otherwise than by common fame; And, if St. *Chrysostom*'s and St. *Jerome*'s conjectures be just, he was prepossessed against him, as an Impostour: If so, the greater still was his Vertue, to overcome those Prejudices so soon, and suffer the Meekness, and Patience, the Charity and Piety of our Lord's miraculous Death to disabuse him. This is so far from making him a late Penitent, that it gives him the Glory of an early Convert: One, whose heart was open to the first Impressions of Grace, and wanted, not so much the Inclination, as the Opportunity, of being brought over

over to the Truth before. And, which is yet more for his Commendation,

2. *Secondly*, We may discern in him a most vigorous and noble Faith. * Such as confess'd our Lord in his lowest, most afflicted, and most ignominious Condition. When his hardned Companion reviled him, When the Enemies of Jesus mocked and insulted over him, When his own Disciples had forsaken, and were afraid to own him; Such as took sanctuary in a dying and universally despised Man; Such as published his Innocence to the face, and in despight, of triumphant Malice; and, through the thickest cloud of Shame and Sufferings, that ever intercepted the Glories of the Son of God, discovered his Divine Power; and placed his hope in a Spiritual Kingdom, which Flesh and Blood and Humane Reasoning could never have discovered. A Kingdom which no Eye but that of Faith could have the least glimpse of; which even They who had enjoyed the honour and advantage of a Three-Year's Instruction and inseparable Conversation, never yet perfectly understood, and now

* Chrysost. Tom. 5. Orat. 7. Pag. 26. Edit. Eton.

now utterly deſpaired of. This was to come in *no whit behind*, nay it was in ſome reſpects to out-ſtrip the very *Chiefeſt Apoſtles*. This was a Confeſſion, ſo reſolute, ſo ſingular, ſo illuſtrious, that no Preacher, no Martyr, ever came up to all the heightning commendations of it. None gave ſo ample a Teſtimony to the Bleſſed Jeſus, becauſe None had this peculiar Excellence, of giving it under ſo many diſadvantagious and diſcouraging Circumſtances.

* Chryſoſt. Tom. 5. Orat. 7.

And now with what * Forehead, with what Colour can any Late or Death-bed Penitent pretend to draw this Example into a Precedent for his own Support and Advantage? What Affinity, what Shadow of Reſemblance is there, between a man ſubmitting to the firſt Impreſſion, and One, who hath wilfully and induſtriouſly hardned his heart againſt all the Methods of Inſtruction and amendment? Between a Man accepting offers as ſoon as they were made; and One who who hath refuſed and thruſt away Salvation from him; and ſtopped his Ears againſt the moſt affectionate and vehement Importunities? Between a Man

Man following readily from the moment he was called; and One, who hath run headily on a long and obstinate course of Wickedness, ridiculed Religion, cast God's Word behind him, quenched and grieved his Spirit, and esteemed it an instance of Gallantry, and Wit, and better Sense, to continue proof against all its motions and most sollicitous strivings with him for his Souls Good? Shall we be so unequal Judges in our own Case, so exceedingly blind and corrupt Advocates for Sin, to bring this unexpected Honour paid to our Saviour in his lowest and most deserted State, to the wretched Level of those Men, who, notwithstanding his Resurrection from the Dead, and Exaltation in Glory; Notwithstanding the Example of the Best and Wisest Men; Notwithstanding the Conquests made by his Gospel, and the Infamy of denying him, yet injure, and affront, despise and defy him, and will not be prevailed upon to confess and come into him, till they cannot hold out in dishonouring him any longer? The Thief acknowledged this King upon the Cross, and these Men disown him upon his Throne; His condition, seemingly forsaken both of

God and Man, did not discourage That Penitent; But These wicked Creatures will not be either awed or invited to come into his most prosperous and triumphant State, when all things conspire to encourage their Obedience: And shall we make the One of these cases a Pattern for the Other? Is it possible, that even Lust and Partiality it self should draw any so perverse, so absurd Consequences, as, from the Acceptance of so ready a compliance, and the Reward of so eminent, so unparallell'd a Faith, to argue for the same Priviledges to long Presumptuous Sin, inflexible Obstinacy, and insolent Contempt? This is so far from *Judging righteous Judgment*, that it is not so much as *judging according to the Appearance*. For the Cases, as to what concerns the merits of the Cause, are not alike in any one Point. They resemble one another in nothing, but that both the Persons are dying. No Christian, who hath lived under the Dispensation of the Gospel, can, at the end of his Days, plead the same ready compliance to the Calls of Grace; And no Man whatsoever can have an opportunity for exerting the same noble Faith,

Faith, becauſe Chriſt could die but once, and his Sufferings and Shame only could have render'd the Penitent Thief's Confeſſion ſo ſingularly glorious. This, I think, puts the *Firſt* Branch of my Argument beyond diſpute; *That* no late or dying Penitent can ſafely depend upon this Example, as a Precedent for the ſucceſs of his own late Repentance; Becauſe there are in This caſe ſome Circumſtances, to which that of no Chriſtian, no not of any other Man in the World, ever were, or can be, parallel. I proceed now in the

II. *Second* place to ſhew, *That, even in thoſe parts of this Thief's Repentance, which are imitable by us, we cannot have the ſame Aſſurance of being pardoned and accepted.* We may poſſibly attain to his Contrition, and Godly Sorrow; to his Humility, and ſuch a Degree of ſaving Faith, as our Condition will admit. But, allowing this to be poſſible, will it from thence follow, that we can be equally ſure that we have actually attained to them? The ſincerity of His Repentance is paſt a doubt, becauſe He, who knows what is in the Heart of every Man, approved and

rewarded it. But we can only go upon Presumptions. The Comforts of our Friends, The Judgment of our Spiritual Guides, who would fain think the best, whom a false Representation of our State may mislead in their Opinion, or Charity and Compassion may dispose to pass a more favourable Sentence than we deserve; More than these we cannot have, except the Testimonies of our own Breasts; and our own Breasts too often flatter us (God knows) into a fatal Security, and *speak Peace, when there is no Peace.* For the *Heart of Man is exceeding deceitful, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?* And Who, the more he knows it, does not find still more reason to suspect it? Those, who argue for a late Repentance, place all the Efficacy of it in a Supposition; that the Person, if he had time and opportunity, would stedfastly persevere in, and faithfully make good, all his holy Purposes: But alas! how frequent instances have we of the Contrary? and Who shall dare to presume That to be his own Case, in which, if himself have not formerly failed, yet a multitude of pretending Penitents fail daily?

How

How many have we ſeen, who, if God had pleaſed to take them away while they ſeem'd to be in a good mind, had left behind them ſuch hopes of their happy Condition, that it would be thought uncharitable and unchriſtian to queſtion it; and yet all this was not the Man's Heart, but his Fright; a violence upon his Nature and ſettled Diſpoſition; The Fit of Sickneſs, and that of Zeal, abated and wore off together; and aſſoon as the ſmart of the Rod was over, all the Remembrance and good Effect of it hath been over with them too. Thus many horrible Relapſes have taught us to be cautious, how we give too eaſie credit to ſuch falſe Appearances of Amendment any more; ſince neither did We underſtand theſe Men, nor They truly underſtand themſelves. Few Stomachs are ſo high and ſturdy, but the Approach of Death, the Terrours of an incenſed God, and the near proſpect of a Gaping Hell, will bring them down. When Men are juſt upon the brink of Eternity, a new Scene opens upon them; Theſe things will then be ſeen and heard; they intrude upon Mens thoughts whether they will or no; and make quite

different Impreſſions, from what they did while at a diſtance, when Health and Strength, the Hurry of Buſineſs, and variety of Pleaſures, helped to divert and drive away the uneaſy Reflection. And, when Matters are come to this Extremity, Who is ſo nice, as truly to diſtinguiſh between the Hatred of Sin and the Dread of Puniſhment; between the Love of God and the Anxious care to preſerve our ſelves; between the ſorrow of the Penitent, and the amazement of his Fears, or the Melancholy of his Diſeaſe? Theſe are ſo perplexed and intricate, that not only Others, but our Selves are exceeding apt to be confounded, and err, in our determinations concerning them. And yet Theſe are all that we have to go upon in a Death-bed Repentance. Which at laſt amount to no more than this; that it does not become Us to ſet bounds to the Mercies of God, and therefore to Him we muſt leave them; for He knows them and We do not; and therefore, how well ſoever we may hope, yet we cannot pronounce any thing peremptorily concerning them.

Cold Comfort, God knows, and ſuch as no Man in his right Wits would

take

take up with, in his Greateſt, his Only Concern. Would Any of us be ſo ſtupid in the Affairs of this World, to content himſelf with a bare Poſſibility, in Matters of the laſt Importance, when he might have an abſolute Certainty? Would We forego our Settlements, and abandon our ſelves to all the miſeries of Want, by ſetting our whole Eſtate upon the hazard of an After-Game, nay of an Equal Chance, when we have it in our Choice to ſecure it againſt all the Power and Tyranny of Fortune? Yet thus and infinitely worſe does every one, that hears me this day, play the fool, who ventures his Soul and Eternity upon a future or dying Repentance, the ſucceſs of which can never be proved to him, while yet he may effectually and infallibly inſure both by a ſpeedy and preſent Repentance, which by producing worthy fruits will demonſtrate its own ſincerity, and prove its ſelf. But why do I talk of an Even Chance, when the Odds are manifeſtly againſt us; for my laſt, and moſt mortifying Conſideration of all, is

III. *Thirdly*, That *it is not only equally Poſſible, but highly Probable indeed,*

deed, that when we come to dye, We may not be like this Thief upon the Croſs, no not ſo much as in the Diſpoſition and very Deſire to repent. The Paſſage, of which my Text is a Part, gives us likewiſe an Example of a Wicked Man, dying hard and impenitent; and if This had not the ſame fate of being overlookt, which all things have that make againſt thoſe corrupt Inclinations we delight to cheriſh, why ſhould not That be as ſtrong an Argument to warn us of our Danger, as the Other is pretended to be for the flattering our Security? Are not His contradicting and blaſpheming Chriſt, as manifeſt inſtances of God's forſaking Men at their laſt hour, as this Man's acknowledging and praying to him can poſſibly be of their being converted and accepted at their laſt hour? The Examples of each kind make the matter equal, but the Reaſon of the thing is far from leaving it ſo; This miniſters infinitely more ground of Fear than of Hope. For Repentance, as well as other Virtues, is the Effect of God's Grace; And, though Grace in the nature of the thing imply a Freedom of Diſtribution, yet, God hath

hath thought fit to ſuſpend this Gift upon certain Conditions, and told us upon what Terms only we may, and upon what we have no right to expect it. That it ſhall be increaſed to them who uſe it diligently, but taken away from ſuch as neglect and abuſe the precious Talent, committed to their Improvement. And, if theſe be the Meaſures God hath fixed to himſelf, how can Thoſe Men promiſe themſelves any Safety, who have all along rejected the only Inſtrument of their Recovery? who have defied the Laws, and defeated all the Methods of God; reſiſted his repeated importunities, dared his vengeance, and now at laſt do not ſo properly leave their Sins, as they are left of them; Who begin to live well, when they think they can live no longer; and were not content to be turned over to God's Service, till Impotence, or Age, or Sickneſs, had rendred them incapable of doing the Devil's Drudgery? St. *Paul* hath read ſuch People's deſtiny, by telling them (*Rom.* II. 4. 5.) that *they who deſpiſe the riches of his mercy, and forbearance, and long-ſufferings, and do not conſider, that the Goodneſs*

neſs of God leads to Repentance, treaſure up to themſelves wrath againſt the day of wrath. So little Encouragement is there to think, that God will enable us to do that, when we come to dye, which we never would be perſwaded to do, while we lived. So juſt occaſion to apprehend, that the Railing and Obdurate Thief's Lot will be Ours. Since Obſtinacy is what God hath provided no remedy againſt; And They, who ſo pertinaciouſly chuſe damnation, make too bold with God, when they look for miraculous and extraordinary Methods, to prevent their inheriting the portion of their Perverſe Folly, and being filled with the bitter fruit of their own Devices.

By this time, I hope, you ſee how weakly They are entrenched, who fortify themſelves in a ſinful Courſe with the ſucceſs of this Thief upon the Croſs. And that, the whole Matter duly conſidered, they are utterly diſarmed of their falſe confidences, and all their own Artillery is turned upon them. For this Paſſage does give us indeed a plain Example of a Man, who was given up to a reprobate Mind, and forſaken

ſaken of Grace at his laſt hour. But neither This, nor any Other paſſage of Scripture that I know of, furniſhes One ſingle inſtance which comes up to the Caſe of common Chriſtians, by ſhewing us a Man rejecting and living impenitent under the means of Grace, and then converted and ſaved at his laſt hour.

But what then is the proper Uſe to be made of this Paſſage, and where are the ſweet, the ſo much extolled Conſolations attributed to it? Even Theſe; that it ſupports Men with an Inſtance, of a great and grievous Malefactor received into Grace, juſt at his leaving the World; Thus it teaches us, that no Impurities of Life, though never ſo foul, No Crimes though never ſo black, never ſo numerous, ſhut us out from Mercy, provided we ſincerely repent; that the Grace of God can pluck back Wretches, when they are at the laſt gaſp, and juſt dropping into everlaſting Torments; but, as to actual Repentance it ſelf, and ſuch Grace being extended to thoſe when they come to death's door, who have been headſtrong and habitual Sinners all their days; the moſt that can be inferred from hence, is, that ſuch a thing

thing *may* be; but it gives us no manner of Security, nor ſo much as one probable Argument to conclude, that it certainly *ſhall* be. In a Word, Repentance, when true, is never too late, and therefore the Thief upon the Croſs is a Sovereign Antidote againſt Deſpair: But Men may outſtay the day of Grace; they may not go about this Work till it be ſo late, that they have loſt both the Will and the Power to repent; and therefore this Example, when truly conſidered, is an excellent Preſervative againſt Preſumption too.

After this, would the Time and Your Patience admit me, I might hope to make ſome good Impreſſion, by repreſenting to You, The Unfitneſs of a Sick Bed or infirm Years for ſo long and laborious a Work as true Repentance is; The danger of delaying it, from the Uncertainty of Life; And the vain Sophiſtry of all thoſe trifling pretences, whereby Men delude themſelves in this important Affair. But I forbear, and only beg You to act in this, with the ſame prudence you would in matters of leſs moment. You would

would not, if you knew a Medicine, which hath recovered thouſands, and will infallibly cure, if applied in the beginning of the diſtemper, you would not in a mortal diſeaſe defer ſuch an application till a Caſe of extremity, when never any that you know of was recovered by it but One, and His Symptoms too vaſtly different from Yours. You would not venture your whole Subſtance upon ſo mad a hazard, where there have been Millions of Blanks for One Prize; and that Prize too got by ſuch a Chance, as can never come up again. Why will you then, with your Eyes open, run ſuch a deſperate riſque of Eternity; *Eternity*, to which the longeſt Life bears not the proportion of a ſingle moment? Why will you ſtake your Souls upon ſo certain a Loſs; *Your Souls*, for which the whole World (could you gain it) is not an equivalent? If therefore you have any regard to theſe; As you would eſcape the agonies of Guilt, the horrours of Deſpair, and dreadful looking for of fiery Indignation to conſume You; as You would ſecure peace of Conſcience, the favour of God, and thoſe comfortable

fortable proſpects of bliſs, which alone can ſupport your drooping Spirits when all worldly comforts forſake You; if there be any charms in the Hope of Heaven here, and the Enjoyment of hereafter; Let my Advice be acceptable to You;

But why do I call it Mine? 'Tis the Apoſtle's Advices, and moſt excellent and pathetical Exhortations thoſe are,

Hebr. III. 12. 13. *To day, while it is called To Day, harden not your hearts, Take heed leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of*

IV. 1. *unbelief; but let us fear, leſt a promiſe being made us of entring into his Reſt,*

2 Cor. VI. 2. *we ſhould at laſt come ſhort of it. Behold now is the accepted time, behold now*

Rom. XIII. 11. 12. *is the day of Salvation; And therefore, knowing that it is now high time to awake out of ſleep, let us caſt off the works of Darkneſs, and let us put on the armour of Light,* now in the time of this mortal Life, *Looking for and haſting to the*

2 Pet. III. 12. *Coming of the Day of God, when the Lord Jeſus ſhall be revealed from heaven in flaming fire, to take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Goſpel of our Lord Jeſus*

2 Theſſ. I. 7. 8. *Chriſt. Who ſhall be puniſhed with everlaſting*

lasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power.

To whom with the Father, and the Holy Spirit, be all Honour and Obedience, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SER-

SERMON V.

St PETER's FALL.

St. Mark XIV. 72.

And Peter called to mind the word that Jesus said unto him, Before the Cock crow twice thou shalt deny me thrice, And when he thought thereon he wept.

AMong the many helps and advantages to a Godly Life, which the Holy Scriptures furnith us with; None are more useful, none better qualified for success, than Those, which a prudent and considerate Reader may draw, from the Examples of eminent Saints recorded there. And These may be of Singular Benefit to us; Not only by those shining Graces and Virtues, that exalted Piety, and unshaken Perseverance, which

which ought to provoke our Zeal and encourage our Imitation: But no leſs by thoſe Blemiſhes and Failings, that Proneneſs to Sin even in the Beſt men, and the Diligence and Painfulneſs of that Repentance, by which they were reſtored to the Favour of God. Which ſhould abate our vain Confidences, and awaken our Care. Of this latter ſort is the Inſtance now before us, concerning St. *Peter*, whoſe Denial of our Saviour all the four Evangeliſts have given us a large and particular account of; and Three of them declare his bitter remorſe of it. St. *Mark* in the Words of my Text, hath confined me indeed to this Laſt only; But becauſe we ſhall be better able to make a right Judgment of his Repentance, when we have firſt conſidered the nature of the Crime that occaſioned it; And in regard the One as well as the Other, may miniſter abundant Matter of Profit and Inſtruction; I ſhall, in treating of this Subject, take in the whole Compaſs of it, and diſcourſe, as well of the Fault implied and referred to, as of the Repentance expreſly contained, in my Text.

And here I cannot think it neceſſary to employ my own Pains or your Patience, in any Critical Niceties, which may tend to reconcile thoſe ſeeming Differences between the ſeveral Goſpels, in ſome Circumſtances relating to this Affair; Which yet, to perſons not very captious and perverſe, are capable of a fair and eaſy Accommodation. But there is matter of far greater moment, which calls for our Attention. And the Subſtance, wherein they agree beyond all Controverſy, is, that both St. *Peter's* Fault, and his Repentance, were very Great and Exemplary. He denied Chriſt, He did it to avoid being thought one of his Diſciples, by the Servants of the High-Prieſt, He perſiſted in that Denial, He repeated and ſtrengthened it with the Solemnity of Oaths and Curſes: But when the Crowing of the Cock, and the Look of his Maſter had called up the Powers of Reaſon and Recollection in his mind; Immediately, upon reflecting what he had done, he went out and wept; He wept * *abundantly*, he wept bitterly.

* ἐπικλαίων ἔκλαιεν.

Theſe are the Paſſages, which we are principally concerned to take notice

tice of. And therefore I ſhall make it my endeavour,

I. *Firſt. To repreſent to you St.* Peter's *Fall, with the moſt remarkable Circumſtances and Aggravations attending it.*

II. *Secondly. St.* Peter's *Repentance, and the undoubted Teſtimonies given of the Serioufneſs and Sincerity of it.* And then under Each of theſe Heads I ſhall draw ſuch Obſervations, as may be of uſe to us, to prevent our falling, or elſe to recover our ſtanding, if we happen to fall, after his Example.

I. *Firſt* then. Let us conſider St. *Peter's Fault, and thoſe Circumſtances attending it,* which may give us a true State of his Caſe.

1. And here, *Firſt* of all, it was undoubtedly one great Aggravation of this Fault, to have been committed by St. *Peter.* A Perſon, who had enjoyed the Benefit of a long and familiar Converſation with his Maſter; Who had not only heard the many excellent Inſtructions delivered to the Multitudes, which upon all occaſions flocked together in great Numbers, to be

taught by him; but who, in private Conferences, had been let in to a more full and distinct Understanding of those Mysteries, which for wise Reasons had been expresst to the promiscuous Crowd of Hearers in Terms sometimes ambiguous and dark. A Person, who, besides the infinite Miracles wrought publickly in Confirmation of the Truth, had been admitted to be an Eye-Witness of such as more clearly and immediately gave Testimony to his Lord's Divine Nature and Authority. Such in particular as the Appearance of *Moses* * and *Elias*, at our Lord's Transfiguration; that *Honour* † *and Glory which Jesus received from God the Father, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent Glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Which voice from heaven*, himself declares, *he heard, when he was with him in the holy mount.* A Person, whom our Lord had chosen the Companion ‖ of his Agonies and Sufferings; and whose Negligence * and Security in time of Danger and Temptation, had been so kindly and so lately reproved. A Person so advanced in Knowledge,

* Matth. XVII.

† 2 Pet. I. 17, 18.

‖ Verſ. 33.

* Verſ. 37.

as to make that early Confeſſion of his being * *the Chriſt the Son of God*, for which he received a particular Bleſſing and Commendation. A Perſon, who had been fore-warned of the extreme Peril of denying this Maſter, and told in very ſolemn manner † that *Whoſoever ſhould be aſhamed of Him and his words in that adulterous and ſinful Generation*, and for ſuch Shame ſhould decline *the confeſſing him before men*; *of Him alſo ſhould the Son of Man be aſhamed, when he cometh in Glory with his Angels, and deny him at the laſt day before his Father which is in Heaven.* A Perſon, who in a due Senſe of all this, had that very Evening profeſſed himſelf ready to go with him *both* * *into Priſon and to Death*, who ſeemed to take it ill, ‖ that he might not bear him Company in all the painful ſteps of his Paſſion; Who was *ready to lay down his Life for his Sake*, nay to diſtinguiſh his Affection and Conſtancy above any of his Brethren, for *though all ſhould be* * *offended* becauſe of his Maſter's Sufferings, *yet would not he*; And therefore being, as he thought, abundantly reſolved, and ſecure of himſelf in this Point, † *ſpake*

* Matth. XVI. 16, 17.

† Mark VIII. 38.

* Luke XXII. 33.

‖ John XIII. 37.

* Verſ. 29.

† Verſ. 31.

the more vehemently, If I ſhould die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wiſe. Laſtly, A Perſon who, according to his natural warmth of Temper, had not only committed himſelf to the Mercy of the Winds and Waves at Jeſus Command, and received a moſt ſenſible and convincing Experiment of his Lord's Almighty Power, by being preſerved from ſinking; but, even in the midſt of his Affliction, had juſt before given a raſh and dangerous Proof of his Zeal, by drawing in his defence, and wounding one of the Officers, that came to apprehend him. And yet, Notwithſtanding all this Knowledge and former Conviction, Notwithſtanding ſuch warning, and long experience, Notwithſtanding all his boaſted firmneſs of mind, and forward attempts to reſcue ſo dear a Maſter; This very St. *Peter* fell off in time of Tryal, and denied and diſclaimed all relation to, all knowledge of, that very *Jeſus*. In all theſe reſpects then, the fault muſt needs be more heinous in St. *Peter*, than it would have been in any other Common Man; becauſe it is a known and obvious Rule of Juſtice, that a Man's Guilt

Guilt in any caſe is to be meaſured in proportion to his advantages of doing better, the Reſolutions that he will, and the Senſe of his own Breaſt, that he ought to, behave himſelf otherwiſe. The greater Reaſon have we to enquire,

2. *Secondly*, What might be the Cauſe of St. *Peter's* Miſcarriage in the Inſtance now before us. Now this, it is very plain, was his Fear: And Fear is a Paſſion ſo interwoven with Humane Nature; ſo immediately conſequent upon that Principle of Self-Preſervation, which ſeems to be the firſt and loudeſt Dictate of Reaſon; ſo apt to confound and overbear our Judgment, where it hath got Poſſeſſion of the Soul; that no Infirmity prevails more ſtrongly, or, when extreme and jnſt, is more excuſed. Religion as well as Philoſophy will, I think, admit *Tully's* diſtinction of *Metus qui cadere poteſt in conſtantem virum*: Some Apprehenſions of Danger, from which the beſt and braveſt minds are not exempted. And, where ſuch Tryals fall upon men, as ſcarce any preſence or firmneſs of Soul ſeems to be a match for, as we do not blame

but pity the unhappy Effects of Them who ſtand not the Shock; ſo God, no doubt, who made us, and knows what we are able to bear, will not fail to compaſſionate, and make Gracious allowances for, ſuch Failings. Had this been St. *Peter*'s Caſe, it had been a mighty abatement to his fault. Had the Extremity, by which he was driven to it, been ſome ſudden ſtartling Accident, of which he had received no warning, could not have entertained any reaſonable expectation, and conſequently could not be ſuppoſed to make proviſion againſt; much more might be alledged in his excuſe, than now there can. Becauſe This was a matter, which our Lord had ſo often foretold ſhould certainly be; and ſo earneſtly enjoyned all his Diſciples to look and to prepare for. The Violence of this Shock ought to have been prevented by thoſe many Significations *, and the ſharp rebuke to this Apoſtle in particular, for not crediting the bitter things foretold concerning himſelf: All which had been awakened again. and their memories refreſhed by the † Diſcourſe of that very Evening, while his Paſſion was drawing

* Matth. XVI.

† V. 27, &c. John XIV, XV, XVI.

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ing on. St. * *Peter* had likewiſe been told over and over, that Hatred and Perſecution and Contempt muſt be the portion of the firſt Planters of the Goſpel; That they muſt follow their Maſter, in his Sufferings no leſs than in his Virtues: That they ſhould be brought before Kings, and Rulers, and Synagogues for his Name's ſake; but even in this diſtreſs they were forewarned whom they † *ought to fear*; not them that kill the Body, and after *that they have no more that they can do; but Him only, who after he hath killed, hath power to caſt into Hell.* This, one would imagine, might have inſpired him with Courage, although he had been brought into the utmoſt hazards. But that was not now his Condition. He ſuffered nothing in his own perſon; He only ſaw his Maſter ſuffer; He only ſaw him ſuffer what he had frequently and punctually been told muſt of neceſſity be. And though ſuch barbarous Treatment might threaten his Diſciples, and ſhew them what they were to expect when it came to their turn; Yet all this was at a diſtance. None of it as yet was begun; St. *Peter* was not ſo much as taken

* Matth. X.

† Luke XII. 5.

taken into Cuſtody, He was not called before the High Prieſt, nor examined by any Officer or Perſon in Authority. Only ſome of the Inferiour Servants officiouſly put this Queſtion; and He, who juſt before had withſtood a band of armed men, is now ſo terrified with the impertinent Jealouſies of a few inſignificant Servants, and a poor ſilly Maid; that he labours to clear himſelf to Them with a moſt ſhameleſs falſhood; * *I know not, neither underſtand I what thou ſayeſt*; that is, My being with *Jeſus* in the Garden, or retaining to him, is ſo far from having any truth in it, that I am abſolutely a Stranger to Him, and to the thing you charge me with.

* Verſ. 67, 68.

3. *Thirdly*, St. *Peter* did not content himſelf with making this Denial Once; but repeated and perſiſted in it. Whether Curioſity, or Affection rather, drew him to the High Prieſt's Palace, † *that he might ſee the End*, it is certain this unſeaſonable Officiouſneſs placed him in the way of a Danger, which by his Abſence might have been avoided. But even after his firſt Denial, he is ſaid ‖ *to have gone out*, and to have heard the Cock crow without any

† Matth. XXVI. 58.

‖ Verſ. 68.

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manner of Impreſſion. So far from this, that he returns again, and mingles with the ſame Company. Fearing, probably, that withdrawing might increaſe their Suſpicion; and chuſing rather to intangle himſelf in the ſame ſnare a ſecond time, and to gain credit by freſh and more obſtinate denials; than to leave any Jealouſy of his having ſaid an Untruth before. And thus One Lye was added for a Confirmation to a former; and Each repeated with greater eagerneſs and vehemence, and in Terms more expreſs and peremptory; till Three diſtinct denials had left him paſt the excuſe of Slips in memory, or Inadvertency, or the Suddeneſs of a Surpriſe, which a ſingle Denial might have received ſome Mitigation from. Nay

4. *Fourthly*, Which is yet a more grievous degree of Guilt, St. *Peter* bound theſe denials upon himſelf with voluntary Oaths and Curſes, and uſed ſuch Forms and ſuch Solemnity, to get a moſt notorious Falſhood believed, as were not lawful for him to have recourſe to, in Confirmation of the Truth it ſelf. And what could be more

more dreadful, than thus to call God as a Witneſs, and to imprecate his Judgment upon his own head, in a thing ſo utterly falſe? A thing, which he ſhould have been ſo far from delivering himſelf from the Suſpicion of; that he ought to have eſteemed it his Honour and greateſt Advantage; and to have owned his Diſcipleſhip to Chriſt, even at the utmoſt hazard, even at the certain expence, of his very Life. Such were the ſad Circumſtances of this Apoſtle's Fall; So unworthy a Perſon of St. *Peter's* Eminence, Provoked by ſo ſlight an occaſion in compariſon of what might happened to him; So obſtinately falſe the Renouncings of his Maſter, ſo impious and blaſphemous his Perjuries againſt him. All which I have thus repreſented before you, as the Evangeliſts themſelves have done to the whole World, not with any envious deſign of leſſening your Eſteem for this glorious Saint, or any malicious Satisfaction that ſome People are apt to take, when they ſhow the actions of others in their worſt Light; but that, by ſeeing this Action in its blackeſt Colours, we may profit by his Sin, be inſtructed by his Danger,

ger, and ſtand the faſter for his Fall. To which purpoſe the Remainder of this Diſcourſe ſhall be ſpent in ſuch uſeful Reflections and Inferences, as the former Particulars, when rightly conſidered, give us great ground for, and plain Intimations of. And They are ſuch as follow.

Firſt, We read this Paſſage to very little Purpoſe, if it do not convince us of the miſerable Frailty even of the Beſt Men, and effectually overthrow all thoſe vain Confidences, which are apt to riſe in our hearts, from our own ſuppoſed Strength and Virtue. For, What a lamentable inſtance is there now before our Eyes, of one of the Greateſt men that ever was, falling in the moſt ſcandalous manner? Who ſhall hereafter dare to depend upon the higheſt degree of Knowledge, when One ſo wiſe, ſo perfectly ſatisfied in the Chriſtian Truth, was yet, in deſpight of the fulleſt Convictions of his own Conſcience, driven to deny and abjure the Lord that taught, the Lord that bought him? Who may preſume upon his beſt Reſolutions, when He, who declared ſo firm a purpoſe of adhering to *Jeſus*, notwithſtanding

ſtanding any Terrours or Afflictions that could poſſibly befall him for ſuch Perſeverance, did yet within a few hours ſo premptorily, ſo ſolemnly diſown that very Perſon, for whom he ſo lately was ready to lay down his Life; and ſo did that very thing which he but juſt before was diſpoſed rather to die, than to do? I ſay was *ready* and *diſpoſed*; For there is no doubt, but St. *Peter* at that time ſpoke the very Senſe of his Soul, that he had an honeſt and ſincere mind, and was ſtedfaſtly determined in his own Breaſt, and thought himſelf ſufficient, to make good to the uttermoſt, what he with ſo much Piety and Affection intended and profeſſed. But here was the Errour, Here the Misfortune, that St. *Peter* over-lookt the infirmities of humane Nature, and, in the warmth of his Zeal, promiſed more than he was able to perform. He relyed upon his own Integrity; and thought, that good reſolutions were an impregnable defence againſt the moſt violent Temptations. But when the Aſſault was made, and that danger drew up cloſe to him, which he at a diſtance deſpiſed; then the Event proved, that, how

how willing and well reſolved ſoever the *Spirit* might be, yet the *Fleſh* alas is but weak; at the beſt exceeding frail and weak. And, if this Great Champion ſo ſoon gave ground, How ſhall We be able to ſtand in the Battel? We, who are Men as well as He, nay, who are Men not near ſo well appointed as He, for this Spiritual Combat? For We have all the ſame Principle of Corruption to betray us, the ſame Paſſions to bear us down; but very Few of Us, (it is to be feared) have the ſame Knowledge and Wiſdom, the ſame Courage and Reſolution, the ſame Zeal and entire Love for our Maſter, that He had, to oppoſe againſt the Tryals, which make head againſt us. But Few of Us, I doubt, have the Grace, even in cold blood, to reſolve that we would *die with* Chriſt, *rather than deny him in any wiſe.* And yet, even thoſe that are never ſo ſerious and ſincere in ſuch purpoſes, know not what will become of them, when they are brought to the proof. We are, it may be, apt to blame or to pity this Apoſtle; and may fancy, how much more valiantly we ſhould have acquitted our ſelves

under

under the like Difficulties; But how extreamly vain all such Despisings of Others, or the Preferring our own Virtue before Theirs are, this sad Experiment instructs us. For He, who declared, that though *all should be offended yet would not He*, fell more shamefully than any of the rest, whose Constancy he suspected, and engaged so far to excel. That very Argument he went upon proved his ruine, and the Opinion of his own Strength was the true Reason, why he was so scandalously weak. So very dangerous it is to think our selves Something, when in truth we are Nothing. So fatal to lean to our own Understanding, and be Wise, and Good, and Safe in our own conceits, when in reallity all our Sufficiency, all our Safety, is entirely of God. So much do even our Excellencies expose us, and such cruel Advantages does the Tempter take from our best Dispositions and Actions, if we grow too sensible of them, too well pleased with them, proud or careless upon their account; If we impute them to our selves, if we ascribe the Success and Improvements we have formerly attained, to

our

our own Virtue; and rely upon the Stedfaſtneſs of our own minds for a Security againſt future Tryals. So different a thing it is to defy Difficulties at a diſtance, and engage them hand to hand; To gain imaginary Conqueſts, and triumph in the falſe and fanciful Notions of our own Strength, and to ſuſtain the fatigues and hazards of the Field in good earneſt. In a word, ſo mortifying an Example of Spiritual Security, is that baffled Apoſtle, who undertook for ſo much, and yet performed ſo very little; So effectually did his own Experience teach Him, and ſo ſeaſonably hath he admoniſhed Us, * that They who are *kept unto Salvation* are *kept through Faith, and by the Power of God.* This alone is a Preſervative ſufficient againſt the Force and Subtlety of thoſe Enemies, that labour our Deſtruction. There is a ſecret hand that works with us, and inſenſibly directs, and over-rules, and eſtabliſhes our hearts. If we go right, it is becauſe Grace ſteers our Courſe, and guides our weak unwary ſteps. If we chuſe the better part, it is becauſe God inclines our Wills. If we eſcape Temptations, it is owing to

* 1 Pet. I. 5.

an inviſible watchful Guard, who puts by many a deſperate Thruſt, and ſhields us from all the Artillery diſcharged at us by the Prince of Darkneſs. If we maintain our Ground, when they aſſail us, it is, becauſe God ſupports us with Courage, confirms our unſtable Reſolutions, and enables to perſevere, and gives us Victory in the *Day* of Battel. Suſtained by theſe Divine Succours, we are more than Conquerors; but when thoſe are, either not lent at all, or drawn off again, we are miſerable, and blind, feeble and naked, and become a cheap and eaſy Prey. And drawn off they will be, when men diſregard Them, and depend upon themſelves. For the proper Seaſon of *God's Strength being manifeſted* is in *Our Weakneſs*, and we are ſtrongeſt in effect, when moſt wretched and impotent in our own eſteem. Had St. *Peter's* Apprehenſion of danger, and diffidence of his own abilities been greater, the iſſue of his Conflict had been leſs diſhonourable. But by the inglorious defeat of a Leader ſo renowned and gallant for the main, God hath taught us, how wretched the Beſt of Men are, when left to ſtand upon their

their Own bottom. That He, who builds upon any Attainments, any Excellencies merely Humane, must expect the Fate of a tottering and sandy Foundation; and, that there is no Rock but Divine Grace, that can weather out the Shocks of Winds and Waves. That, in all our Spiritual Encounters it is the safest and the prudentest thing we can do, to distrust our own Abilities, to watch and pray; To watch diligently, because we are frail and apt to be overtaken; To pray fervently, because without our asking we cannot obtain that Assistance, which if we fail of, we are unavoidably vanquished. And therefore, if at any time we come off with Honour and Success, *Not unto Us, O Lord, not unto Us, but unto thy Name be the Praise.* For we are not able to stand before the mighty force that cometh against us, neither *is it our own Arm that helpeth us; But thy right hand, and thy Arm, and the Light of thy Countenance, because thou hast a favour unto us.* In short, My Brethren, We can do nothing of our selves, but are able * to do *all things, through Christ that strengthens us*; and therefore can never trust

* Philip IV. 13.

Our Selves too little, or Him too much.

2. *Secondly*, Let us from this Example learn to consult our Safety, by keeping, as much as is possible, out of the way of Temptation. St. *Peter* seems to have run himself into Danger, by an unseasonable Instance of Affection for his Master; and Many well intending men are in like manner entangled in difficulties, by giving rash and hazardous Proofs of their Zeal. We are commanded to pray, *that God would not lead us into Temptation*, but all Prayer supposes our own endeavours to obtain the Blessing we pray for. And therefore we must not expect to be heard, if we lead our selves into Temptation, and rush upon Mischief which we might avoid. There are but very few of so confirmed a Virtue, as to be fit to bid the Enemy Battel, or to hold out against great and hazardous Encounters; and therefore the surest Course is to act altogether upon the Defensive; to look well before us, and stand at a distance. Little do men consider what they do, when they indulge themselves in the Approaches to Sin, and venture to play

upon

upon the Brink of the Precipice. While we are cool, and nothing diſcompoſes our Spirits, we are apt to take falſe meaſures of our Abilities; and fondly to imagine, that we ſhall be capable of the ſame juſt Reaſonings and regular Management, in the heat of Action, as we find before we come to engage. But alas! when once the Fight begins we are quite other men; All is preſently Rout and Confuſion; Our Minds are diſordered, our Paſſions enflamed, our Sufferings preſs hard upon Fleſh and Blood, our Fears or our Pleaſures bear down upon us, and, in deſpight of all our boaſted Valour, we give ground. It is therefore a neceſſary effect of Diſtruſting our own Strength urged in my Laſt Particular; that we run as few Riſques, as poſſibly we can: That we labour, as much as may be, to ſubdue our Paſſions, and even, when we ſeem to have them in moſt abſolute Subjection, that we provoke them not to riſe in Rebellion againſt us: That we ask and improve the Grace of God to the utmoſt of our Power; but, when we are endued with it moſt plentifully, that we put it upon no deſperate Experiments.

The Conduct of a Wiſe and Good Chriſtian is like that of a Peaceable Prince, who gets himſelf Glory by maintaining his own Territories in Quiet and good Order, rather than by affecting to enlarge them at the expence of Blood and Treaſure; and the unneceſſary Danger of loſing his Own, while he makes War upon Others. When the Providence of God brings Tryals upon us, (Which it does when our Prayers and Prudence cannot prevent them) We may reaſonably hope, that this Grace will be magnified, in our reſcue from Difficulties of his own ſending. But there is not the ſame Aſſurance due to thoſe Troubles, which our own Forwardneſs, and Indiſcretion involves us in. For God hath no-where promiſed to work Miracles for our Deliverance, nor engaged to ſave Them who are not careful to ſave themſelves. And therefore we muſt uſe all poſſible Caution; and decline as much as may be all hazardous accidents. We muſt not court opportunities of diſtinguiſhing our Chriſtian Bravery, when our Duty does not call us to it. Our Lord hath commanded us to take up our Croſs, when

when he lays it in our way; but he hath not commanded, that we ſhould go out and ſeek it, nay, or that we ſhould meet it, when we can paſs by another way, and honeſtly and with a good Conſcience eſcape from it. He hath promiſed to *ſuccour them that are tempted*, that is, ſuch as are purely paſſive in the thing. But when Men break their Ranks, and, without Orders from their Commander, will needs march up as it were to the mouth of a loaded Cannon, by turning their own Tempters; This is not Courage but Foolhardineſs. And whatever Expectations theſe Men may cheriſh of God's Aſſiſtance in ſuch Caſes, they are not the Effects of a vigorous Faith and well grounded Truſt, but of a blind and hot-headed Preſumption. For all the Promiſes of Grace, and our Belief of them, ſuppoſe the Uſe of proper Means; And of thoſe means the Firſt and Beſt is, To prevent our danger. And, as no Man in his Senſes would venture the breaking a Leg or an Arm in Confidence of his Chirurgeon's Skill to ſet it again: So neither will any conſiderate Chriſtian lay himſelf open to Sin, or make needleſs Approaches

toward it, becauſe he knows that God is more powerful to preſerve, than the Devil can be to deſtroy. For it is not the Power of God that is our Security, but the Knowing that he will exert that Power on our Behalf. And this we cannot know, but rather the direct contrary, when the Temptation is our own act and deed. For the dangers, which We chuſe, have no right to his Protection; and it is a righteous thing with Him to ſuffer ſuch men as wantonly ſet their Souls at ſtake, to *eat the bitter fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own fooliſh devices.*

3. *Thirdly*, The Wariness I have been adviſing to keep aloof from Temptation may yet be farther inforced, by conſidering, from this Inſtance of the Apoſtle before us, how the Commiſſion of one Sin draws us on to more and greater. Thus He, after One denyal, proceeded to a Second and a Third, and did not ſtick to ſtrengthen them with falſe Oaths and horrid Curſes. And thus, in Other caſes, when men have once let go their hold, they are carried as it were down the ſtream, and let themſelves drive, till at laſt they ſink into the groſſeſt Impieties.

Impieties. This is the natural effect of ſinful Acts; that they quickly grow into Habits, weaken and waſte the Conſcience, harden men by Cuſtom, and by degrees deſtroy their very Principles. But eſpecially, when they ſuffer themſelves to do an ill thing for the eſcaping ſome preſent Inconvenience, if then they feel their Danger continue or increaſe, they imagine themſelves under a neceſſity of growing bolder as they are more preſs'd. And, having gone too far to retreat with Honour or Safety, endeavour to diſengage themſelves by more grievous and obſtinate degrees of Sin. There is not in the whole World a more abandoned Wretch, than He that is forced to drudge on in a Courſe of Wickedneſs, by the difficulty and the ſhame of retracting his former Errours. No man knows what ſuch an embroyled State will grow to, or where the Man will ſtop. That Principle which ſhould have preſerved him is given up; and when the Reproaches of his own mind are broken through, he lies at the mercy of every freſh Temptation, and wants only opportunities of becoming every day worſe and more profligate

profligate. And This is very obſervable, as in all other caſes, ſo particularly in the caſe of Lying, which comes neareſt to St. *Peter's* in my Text. How confidently men will ſtand in defence of Falſhood, and what pains they often take to gain Credit, by repeating and confirming what they have ſaid or done amiſs; and how quickly this ſettles into a habit of Falſhood, till they ſeem at laſt to have loſt and laid aſide all regard to Honeſty and Truth, the Checks of Conſcience, or the Vengeance of Almighty God: And, yet the Event at laſt is like that of St. *Peter's* Denials here; to entangle themſelves faſter in the ſnare; and the more they ſtruggle to get quit of their Difficulties, the more to aggravate their Sin, and expoſe their Reputations. So that, after all, the wiſeſt and ſafeſt, as well as the ſhorteſt Courſe, is to ſtick faſt to our Duty. For Truth and Honeſty will carry us through, where all the Shifts and Shufflings of wicked Craft will forſake and betray us. And it were well, if Servants, and Children, and ſuch as are under Authority; or indeed Any, who lie under the fears of danger or diſpleaſure, would obſerve

ſerve this matter duly. For, beſides the great Offence which lying Excuſes are to Almighty God, every Maſter, or Perſon with whom we have to deal, cannot but think the Fault and Provocation doubled by this means. And no Man of Reaſon or common Senſe, can ſuppoſe himſelf ſecure of our Faithfulneſs to his Service or Intereſt, if he diſcover in us a diſpoſition, upon every ſlight occaſion, to deal indirectly; that we make no bones of ſacrificing Truth to Reſpect, and being unfaithful to the Witneſs within our own Breaſts, and our great Lord and Maſter in Heaven.

4. *Fourthly*, From hence we may be able to ſatisfy our ſelves of the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God, in cauſing the Faults and Infirmities of his Saints, to be recorded in Holy Scripture, and the Uſe we ought to make of their Failings and Temptations. Not to flatter our ſelves in any manner of Evil, as if We might notwithſtanding be dear and acceptable to God. For theſe men were ſo upon the account of their Eminent Virtues, and their as Eminent Repentance, where they did amiſs; Otherwiſe the Threatning in *Ezekiel* had

Ezek. XVIII. 24. had been their Portion, *All their former Righteouſneſs ſhould not have been mentioned* in the Day of Account, but in the *treſpaſs and the Sin which they have ſinned, in theſe they ſhould have died.* But This was done for a ſeaſonable Warning, and to be an effectual Humiliation to all future Ages; by letting us ſee, that the moſt Perfect of Men are ſtill but Men; Subject to mighty Blemiſhes and Imperfections; and that the higheſt and moſt purified State we can poſſibly arrive at in this World, is no Security from Danger. This ſhould make us very tender, how we judge and deſpiſe our Brethren; Whoſe Faults, how ſeverely ſoever we may think fit to cenſure, it is highly probable would be our own; were Their Circumſtances and Their Temptations Ours. This alſo confutes the Imagination of Some, who teach, that They, who have true Faith and true Grace, can never fall from it. An Opinion extreamly falſe, and groundleſs. For What is true Faith and true Grace, if that Confeſſion of St. *Peter* did not ſhew it, which our Lord ſo highly commended, declared he would build his Church upon, and pronounced him

him Bleſſed for? And What is Falling from ſuch Grace and Faith, if the obſtinate repeated denying, and abjuring of Chriſt be not? Theſe Inſtances therefore of ſuch Worthies miſcarrying ſo groſly ring in our Ears thoſe Admonitions of St. *Paul*, *Be not high-minded but fear, and Let Him that thinketh he ſtandeth take heed leſt he fall*, and *If a man be overtaken in a Fault, reſtore ſuch a one with the Spirit of Meekneſs conſidering thy ſelf, leſt thou alſo be tempted.* They forbid us to promiſe our ſelves Safety and Freedom from Temptation in any Circumſtances of humane Life; Or ſo far to preſume upon our former Virtues, as to think our ſelves incapable even of the blackeſt Vices, if God ſhould withdraw his Grace from us, and leave us to our own poor Powers, and unwary Meaſures. They awaken our Care, mortify our Vanity, and remind us of our Dependance upon a Higher Power, and to give Him the Acknowledgments due for all the Good we do, and for all the Evil we do not. And, as they admoniſh, ſo do they comfort us too, by ſhewing, that God does not utterly caſt

Rom. XI. 20. 1 Cor. X. 12. Gal. VI. 1.

off

off his Servants, no not when they offend very grievouſly and ſcandalouſly. That we need not, ought not to deſpair, though our Tranſgreſſions be very many, very heinous, ſince there is ſtill Room left for ſecond and better Thoughts; And, provided Men return and endeavour to make amends for their paſt Offences, they ſhall be kindly received, and freely pardoned. And therefore, when we read This and the like Paſſages, we muſt be ſure not to ſtop in the midſt, but take in the whole Relation, and obſerve the Character throughout. For St. *Peter's* Fall will miniſter juſt ground of Comfort, to None, but ſuch as are careful to riſe with him again. His Sin indeed is a Warning to us, but his Repentance is no leſs a Pattern. They that blame his Sin, will do well to obſerve his Sorrow; and if they abhor the One, they will not perhaps find it ſo eaſy to imitate the Other. Let us remember, that there are ſeveral ways of denying God and Chriſt, and St. *Paul* expreſly ſays, *They do it in works* and in effect, who do not live according to what they believe. This I am afraid Few, if Any

of

of us can purge our ſelves wholly of; and therefore, ſince our guilt is not far from St. *Peter's*, but only doing the ſame thing after another faſhion; it will be neceſſary, that our Concern and Reformation ſhould come up as near to His, as the nature of the Fault does. In order whereunto, My ſecond Head propoſes to treat of St. *Peter's* Repentance. And that (God willing) ſhall be the Buſineſs of my next Diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON VI.

St. *Peter's* Repentance.

St. Mark XIV. 72.

And Peter called to mind the Word that Jesus said unto him; Before the Cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice. And when he thought thereon, he wept.

FROM these Words I proposed to treat of Two General Heads.

I. First, *St.* Peter's Fall, *which is implyed and referred to in the Text, and*

II. Secondly, His Repentance, *which is expressly contained in it.*

Concerning the Former of these, I have already spoken at large; And shall now proceed to the Latter;

St.

St. *Peter's* Repentance. And here I ſhall obſerve the ſame method as before: Conſidering carefully the ſeveral Steps and Parts of this Repentance in the *firſt* place; and then drawing from this Example ſuch Reflections as are proper to the Occaſion, and may be uſeful to all Chriſtians in general, More eſpecially to Such, whoſe unhappy Engagements in a ſinful Courſe have rendred a very deep and ſolemn Repentance neceſſary, for reſtoring them to the Favour of an offended God.

1. *Firſt* then, Let us conſider this Repentance ſo far as St. *Peter* himſelf was concerned in it. And here it may be convenient to take notice of the *Four* following Particulars. Which, though not all expreſſed in the words before us, yet are to be gathered plainly, from the Relations which the other Evangeliſts have left us concerning this Matter.

1. Now the *Firſt* thing obſervable here, is That, which gave the occaſion to this Change. And This we are told by all the Evangeliſts was the Crowing of the Cock. But St. *Mark* hath informed us * particularly, that

* Verſ. 68.

St. *Peter* had heard him Crow once before, without any manner of Impreſſion. And therefore St. *Luke* gives us a very good Intimation, how the Repeating it a Second time came to be more effectual than the Firſt. For this Evangeliſt is ſingular in one Circumſtance, mentioned (*Ch.* XXII. 61.) *The Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter then remembred the word of the Lord*, &c. So that this Glance of our Lord upon St. *Peter* falling in ſo ſeaſonably with that Crowing of the Cock, awakened his mind, and made him attend to that Signal of his Duty, that Remembrancer of the fault our Lord had foretold, and He had ſo ſadly fulfilled. This then ſo backed, ſo ſent home to his Conſcience put him upon the *Second* thing remarkable,

2. Which is, His own Recollection. *He remembred the word that Jeſus had ſaid*, and found, by comparing his own Behaviour with it, how ſhamefully he had fallen from his boaſted Courage and Conſtancy; How frail and unſtable his ſtrongeſt Reſolutions had proved; How much better our Lord underſtood him, than he underſtood himſelf; How very quickly, and eaſily

eaſily he had been betrayed into a Crime, of which he could not believe himſelf capable; How baſe he had been to ſo kind a Maſter; How falſe to his own purpoſes; How regardleſs of Truth, How peremptory in a moſt notorious Falſhood; How profane in the Oaths and Curſes, by which he had bound it upon his Conſcience. For by this Remembrance, and Thought, no doubt is intended a Repreſenting to himſelf the Offence he had committed, in its blackeſt Colours; and loading it with all the dreadful Aggravations, which of right belonged to it. All which, when ſet before him, proved ſo frightful a Spectacle, that he could no longer refrain from Tears; for that is the

3. *Third* Circumſtance obſervable in his Behaviour. When he *thought thereon he wept*, or as ſome underſtand it, he burſt out into Tears immediately: intimating hereby both the Suddenneſs, and the Extremity of his Grief; Such as ſought a convenient place to give it ſelf free vent in; and therefore *he went out and wept bitterly.*

Without entring into the Diſpute, what may be the propereſt Interpreta-

tion of those words by which St. *Mark*
* ἐπιβαλὼν ἔκλαιεν. * hath described this Action, it is sufficiently manifest, that St. *Peter's* Reflection upon what he had done produced in him this Sorrow, and that his Sorrow was very serious and hearty. The inward Horrours of his mind expressing themselves by the abundance of his Tears, and all other Marks of bitter Remorse, which we can suppose his Condition to require, or be capable of. And This must needs have been more than can be easy for us to conceive. For the Anguish of a wounded Spirit is no more to be described, than it is to be born. And in St. *Peter* every thing conspired to increase this Confusion. For, besides the many particular Circumstances, that heightned his Guilt, and embittered the Remembrance of so foul an Offence; the very Kindness of his Master, who in the midst of Contumelies and Sufferings seem'd to forget himself a while, and had a Compassionate Look in reserve to reclaim Him, must needs have added a great deal to his Astonishment and Concern. There being nothing more apt to soften and melt a Man's heart down, and reduce him to an effectual

Sense

Senſe of his own Vileneſs and Ingratitude, than ſome very undeſerved Kindneſs of a Perſon, whom he hath heinouſly injured. And what greater Indignity could St. *Peter* put upon his Lord, than thus to diſown and abjure him? What greater Kindneſs could our Lord ſhew to this revolting ungrateful Man, than, by the ſilent but ſignificant Rebuke of his Eye caſt that way, ſo opportunely to call him back to himſelf? And what could cut St. *Peter* more to the quick, than ſuch an Inſtance of Mercy and Tenderneſs? Such as ſhewed a greater Concern for his Diſciples Sin, than for all the Injuries and Inſolence of his Enemies to himſelf; Such as declared, though that wicked Servant had diſclaimed his Maſter, yet that He was ſo gracious, as not even thus to diſcard and forſake Him. This, I make no doubt, was one of the bitterеſt Ingredients in St. *Peter's* Sorrow; and that which confirmed him in his Duty ever after, as much as any other Conſideration whatſoever.

4. And this puts me in mind of a *Fourth* thing very neceſſary to be obſerved (which, though not mentioned here, yet is abundantly evident from

other Paſſages of the New Teſtament) and that is, the Thorough Change wrought in St. *Peter* by this Godly Sorrow; and the ample Amends he afterwards made for all the Diſhonour this Denial of Chriſt could poſſibly reflect upon Himſelf, his Maſter, or the Chriſtian Religion. For, immediately after our Lord's Reſurrection, we find the ſame ardent Affection flaming out again as bright as ever. This * once diſmayed St. *Peter*, did then caſt himſelf into the Sea, out of Impatience to haſten to Jeſus upon the Shore; He † put himſelf forward † on the Day of *Pentecoſt*, and, with undaunted Zeal, aſſerted the Reſurrection and Divinity of that Saviour, whom he had formerly denied. He ‖ maintained his Point againſt the *Jewiſh* Rulers, deſpiſed their Rebukes and angry Menaces, and plainly told them, that *God was to be obeyed rather than Men*, and therefore whatever it coſt him, He could not forbid himſelf, publickly declaring the Truths which he had ſeen and heard. He * ſtrengthened the Brethren by his reſolute Behaviour, led them on bravely, and took all poſſible care to keep them from ſhrinking at the Terrours

* John XXI. 7.

† Acts II. 14.

‖ Acts IV. 19, 20.

* Acts IV. 23. 1ſt and 2d Epiſt.

of

of Perſecution. He perſiſted in his preaching, and when the Enemies of the Faith were not to be reaſoned out of their malice, moſt willingly offered his Perſon to ſcourging and Impriſonment; * *rejoycing that he was counted worthy to ſuffer ſhame for the* once abjured *Name of Jeſus:* He was the Mark of Envy and Rage, ſingled † out by *Herod* for a Sacrifice, that would above all others content the *Jews*; And therefore was intended to gratify their Spight, by making his Death add to the Triumphs and ſolemn Rejoycings of their Paſſover. And, though God ſaw fit to diſappoint that Deſign, and reſerve him for more and greater Services to the Chriſtian Cauſe; yet did he at laſt glorify him, by the ſame kind of Tortures and Death, which his Maſter condeſcended to undergo; nay, St. *Peter* gladly received the notice of this from Chriſt's own mouth. So that St. *Peter* was not more different from himſelf, when trembling at the Voice of a ſilly Damſel; than the ſame St. *Peter* afterwards, the Glorious, the Invincible Apoſtle, before the Council, in Priſons, and upon the Croſs, was from the Cowardly, the Infamous Re-

* Acts V. 40, 41.

† Acts XII. 4.

‖ John XXI. 18, 19.

negade in the High Prieſts Hall. This ſettled and deliberate Fidelity was a noble Compenſation for the Infirmity, and Fears, and violent Tranſport of his Fall. This ſhewed what the Man was, when perfectly himſelf, and ſupported by the Grace of God; As the Other did, what he was, when naked and deſtitute of Heavenly Succours; depending upon his own Strength, and left in the hand of his Paſſions. This reſtored him to Favour, and hath eſtabliſhed his Honour to all Eternity. And we ſhould not have done right to St. *Peter* in handling the Caſe now before us, ſhould theſe laſt and Finiſhing Scenes of his Life have been omitted. Becauſe whatever he had done amiſs through Frailty and hurry, he thus undid again, in cool, and ſtaid, and deliberate Acts. And, ſince Repentance is an Alteration of the Man, of his whole Temper, and Behaviour; I thought my ſelf bound to ſet before you ſome of thoſe Inſtances, which the Holy Ghoſt hath left upon Record, of the Efficacy and Sincerity of this Man's Repentance. And Bound indeed I eſteem my ſelf, not only in Juſtice to the Memory of this Eminent Apoſtle,

Apoſtle, but for Your ſakes too; in regard of thoſe Uſes and Inſtructions that are capable of being drawn from hence. For That is the next thing I am now applying my ſelf to; The making ſome Reflections upon St. *Peter's* Repentance, of which all Chriſtian's may profit themſelves, who read and conſider it with ſerious and due Attention.

1. And *Firſt*, From the Conſideration of this Inſtance before us, it will be no hard matter to poſſeſs our minds with a right Notion of the Promiſes of God to Good Men, with regard to Temptations. He hath not engaged, that our Virtue ſhall never be brought into hazard; for This would prevent the Proofs of our Fidelity to him, which is chiefly ſeen in our Conſtancy under thoſe Tryals that endanger it. And therefore in this caſe we are to ſupport our Spirits, with thoſe Aſſiſtances of his Grace, which may enable us to reſiſt Temptations. Nay, he hath not aſſured us, we ſhall always be ſucceſsful in our Reſiſtance, when thus aſſaulted; but thinks it ſufficient Encouragement, that, if through the Infirmity of our Corrupt Nature, and the

the Violence of our Temptations, we happen to be overcome and fall into Sin, his Grace shall not be wanting to raise us again by Repentance. Thus our Lord tells St. *Peter*, * that he had *prayed for him* that *his Faith might not fail*; that is, that he might not fall away finally. His Faith we see did fail for a Season; for such peremptory Denials of our Lord could not be consistent with that saving Principle. But That, which received so terrible a damp by this Interruption, was not utterly lost and extinguished in his mind. The Distemper in its own Nature was Mortal, but, by the Power, and Skill, and timely Application of his Spiritual Physician, it received a perfect Cure. Christ therefore did not pray for the Prevention of his Sin, but for his Conversion from, and Amendment after it. And this was every whit as much for the Benefit of the Patient, and the Honour of the Divine Grace, as the preserving him in perfect Health and Soundness could possibly have been. Nay, more indeed, both for the One and the Other. For the greater the Danger was, the more clearly does the Sovereign Virtue and Efficacy

* Luke XXII. 32.

Efficacy of the Remedy appear. The Grace of God is never ſo conſpicuous, never triumphs ſo gloriouſly over the Powers of Satan, as when it revives wretched Offenders from the *Death of Sin unto the Life of Righteouſneſs*. And the grievous Miſcarriages of Good Men are often ſo ordered, as to turn to their mighty Advantage. For Theſe have a natural Tendency to awaken their care; they make them more ſenſible of their own Weakneſs and Danger, and more vigilant to prevent it for the time to come, than otherwiſe they would have been, if their own Experience had not taught them, upon what ſlippery Ground they ſtand. They diſpoſe them to be more tender and compaſſionate to their Brethren; more gentle and ſparing in their Cenſures; more ready to forgive what is done amiſs; more diligent to contribute their endeavours for the reſcuing and *reſtoring ſuch in the Spirit of Meekneſs*; when they reflect how eaſy it is to be overtaken, and how prone All, even the Beſt Men, are to offend. And they kindle in ſuch Penitents a vigorous and active Zeal, to make amends for the ſcandal of a bad Example,

ple, by a ſtricter Holineſs, and brighter Virtues for the time to come. So little reaſon is there, that we ſhould be delivered from all Temptation, or be ſecured from ſinning when we are tempted; when the Conſequences both of the One and the Other may be, and often are, ſo managed by the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of Providence, as not only not to deſtroy or impair the Piety of private Men, but, with the Increaſe of That, to become Inſtruments of Greater Good: More effectual to our own Salvation; More ſerviceable to the Glory of God and his Grace; and More beneficial to Religion in general, than if Good Men had never been tempted, or never fallen at all.

2. *Secondly*, As St. *Peter*'s Fall confutes the Errour of Thoſe, who hold, that men who once have true Grace cannot loſe it, ſo St. *Peter*'s Riſing again proves, that ſuch as have had the Unhappineſs to loſe Grace, may be reſtored and recover it again. And this overthrows the *Novatian* Hereſy, which conſiſted in affirming, that there is no remiſſion to be had for Sins committed after Baptiſm, and againſt which the Sixteenth Article of our Religion is directly

rectly levelled. An Errour, in all Appearance, chiefly owing to the miſtaken Interpretation of two Texts to the *Hebrews*, which have created great perplexity to ignorant and unwary Souls. *The firſt is that in* (Heb. VI. 4, 5, 6.) *It is impoſſible for thoſe who were once enlightned, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghoſt, And have taſted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they ſhall fall away to renew them again unto repentance.* The other (Heb. X. 26, 27.) *If we ſin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins: But a certain fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation, which ſhall devour the Adverſaries.* Now for a right Underſtanding of theſe Paſſages, we are to obſerve theſe Three things.

1. *Firſt*, That the Scripture often expreſſes that by *Impoſſible* which is extreamly difficult: Or which is impoſſible for humane Strength only, but not ſo to Nature aſſiſted by Divine Grace. And thus our Bleſſed Saviour explains himſelf concerning *Rich* * *Mens entring into the Kingdom of God*; by ſaying, that though this be *impoſſible* with regard

* Matth. XIX. 26.

regard to the Corruptions and Temptations of such Persons, and any Power of their own to resist, and vanquish them, yet * *the things that are impossible with Men are possible with God.* He may, by the prevailing influencces of his Grace, wean their hearts from the World, and effectually dispose them to accept such Terms of Salvation, as of themselves they would never incline or submit to. And thus, though men who reject and quench the Holy Spirit by wilful Sin, cannot renew themselves, yet God can give them the Heart and Power of Repentance and Renovation.

* Luke XVIII. 27.

2. *Secondly*, The Apostle, addressing himself to *Jews*, speaks with allusion to the Law of *Moses*, which, though it allowed of Sacrifices for the Expiation of Involuntary Sins, such as proceeded from Ignorance or Infirmity, yet did not make the like Provision for wilful, and deliberate, and presumptuous Offences. But that This is not to be so strictly taken, as if the Christian Dispensation had made no Provision for even such neither, is evident from that Argument, * whereby the same Apostle proves the Excellence of

*Act. XIII. 38, 39.

of Ours, above the Levitical Inſtitution. *Be it known unto you, that through this man* (Jeſus Chriſt) *is preached unto you Forgiveneſs of Sins; And by Him all that believe are juſtified from all things from which ye could not be juſtified by the Laws of Moſes.* If therefore men might, even by the Law of *Moſes*, be juſtified from thoſe Sins which were not wilful; and if by Faith in Chriſt men may be juſtified from all things, which by the Law of *Moſes* they could not be juſtified from; It follows, that, by the Evangelical Covenant, even Wilful Sins are capable of a pardon in them that believe. I ſay, *in them that believe*, for, to remove this Difficulty effectually, we muſt obſerve,

3. *Thirdly*, That thoſe Texts to the *Hebrews* are meant, not of every ſort of wilful Offenders, but of ſuch as revolt and fly off entirely from the Faith and Profeſſion of the Goſpel. For which reaſon they are branded with the Titles * of *Adverſaries*, and ſuch *as crucify the Son of God afreſh, trample him under foot, count the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing, and do deſpight to the Spirit of Grace.* And theſe men, to be ſure, it is impoſſible to renew, while

* Heb. X. 27, 29.

while they continue in their Apoſtacy: Becauſe they have caſt off their only Remedy. For Faith is the indiſpenſable Condition of Pardon, *All that believe are juſtified*, ſays St. *Paul*; But this Faith They have renounced and diſclaimed; and conſequently are not within the Covenant, nor under the Influence of Grace, or the Poſſibility of Benefit from the Sacrifice of the Blood, which they eſteem *Common* and no *Sacrifice at all*. But the Caſe is far otherwiſe with Them, who are engaged in a ſinful Courſe, and yet have not thrown off the Foundation of Chriſtianity. They may ſee their Folly, and acknowledge the merit of their Saviour's Atonement; They may comply with the good motions of that Spirit, which they too long have quenched and reſiſted, though they have not formally diſavowed and done publick deſpight to him. There is a mighty difference, between walking unworthy of the Chriſtian Faith, and being formal and open Adverſaries to it; Between a Converſation unbecoming the Goſpel, and Principles that profeſſedly overthrow the Goſpel. And conſequently, Thoſe Paſſages of Scripture,

mre, which ſtrike at the One of theſe, and declare it incapable of Forgiveneſs; need not, muſt not be ſo applyed to the Other, as to exclude from all Hope and Comfort, a Caſe ſo very diſtant from the former.

Thus much however muſt be acknowledged, for a Terrour to all who ſhall preſume to ſin with a high hand; that the more wilful any Man's Offences have been, the harder he will find it to repent, and the greater reaſon he hath to dread the being forſaken by God, and given up to a Reprobate mind. For God is ſo far provoked in ſome caſes, as not to afford that Grace, which is effectual to Repentance; when obſtinate and hardned Wretches have long abuſed and withſtood it; Whereas he ſhews himſelf more tender and eaſy to be reconciled, to thoſe who have Ignorance or Infirmity to plead in Mitigation of their Faults. A notable Inſtance whereof we ſhall do well to obſerve in St. *Peter* and *Judas*. For, though both were guilty of mortal Sin, yet the Quality of their Facts was as different, as the Event of them. St. *Peter* indeed denied our Lord baſely,

obſtinately, blaſphemouſly. But how came he to do it? He knew he ought not, he reſolved he would not, he came full of that Reſolution; But the Terrour of his Maſter's Sufferings, and the Violence of his own Fears ſo confounded him, that he had not his thoughts and judgment at liberty; Aſſoon as ever he was reſtored to the uſe of his reaſon, he checked and condemned himſelf moſt ſeverely for what he had done. The fault was begun, and ended, and lamented, and all in the ſpace of an Hour or Two; And this ſhort defection was compenſated by the moſt reſolute Confeſſion of *Jeſus* all his Life after. So that, though This were a very grievous Crime, yet there was ſomething to extenuate the heinouſneſs of it. His Will was not principally and primarily concerned, it moved not of it ſelf, but was over-born by his Affections. And this action ought in equity to be imputed, to a diſtemper of Paſſion, rather than to any ſettled Senſe of his mind. Had he been cool, and ſedate, and perfectly at his own diſpoſal, we ſhould have ſeen him quite another Man. And therefore *Jeſus* had a kind

kind reproving look in ſtore for Him, and mercifully allowed for thoſe Infirmities, with which the partaking of our Nature had made him ſo intimately well acquainted.

But we read of no ſuch Grace extended to *Judas*, nor was there in Him the ſame pitiable Circumſtances to incline it. He laboured under no difficulties, from which his Treachery might ſeem a neceſſary Expedient to deliver him. His only Temptation was the Naughtineſs and ſordid Covetouſneſs of his own mind; His Wickedneſs was a Work of Deliberation and long Contrivance, and ſolemn Debate; He conſulted with the High-Prieſts and Elders, of the Time, the Place, and every Circumſtance for the moſt convenient Execution of his Villany; He ſet his own Soul and his Maſter's Life to ſale at a vile price; continued his attendance upon that Maſter ſtill; that ſo, under the diſguiſe of Friendſhip, and by ſuch laboured Hypocriſy, he might the better carry on his deſign of deſtroying him. And, when his Project was thus formed, he had many broad hints given him, that *Jeſus* had detected his

designs; many warnings of the Sin and Danger he was running into; and, *that it* * *had been better for him if he had never been born*; And yet none of these altered his purpose. So that in this Act of *Judas* there were all the Characters of a Malice prepense, a settled inflexible Resolution to do wickedly. This was intirely the Work of his Will; And Such a one, as plainly shewed him to have cast off all Faith in Christ; To intend as much as could be, the utter overthrow of Him and his Doctrine, and to have been what our Lord calls him, † a *Devil*. And accordingly, The Regret he afterwards felt, seems rather to have been the effect of Confusion, and Rage; than any godly Relenting; the Agonies of Frenzy, and Amazement, and Despair, which are most distant things in the World from that sober and regular Sorrow, which * worketh *Repentance unto Salvation not to be repented of.*

* Matth. XXVI. 24.

† John VI. 70, 71.

* 2 Cor. VII. 10.

The design of this Comparison is to beget in all that hear me a just abhorrence of all Wilful Sin; that None of us may dare to act, deliberately and in cold Blood, those things which our

our Reaſon and our Conſcience tell us ought not to be done. For, though the caſe of every wilful, no nor of every habitual Sinner, be not ſo deſperate as that of *Judas*; Yet we may from hence be ſenſible, that where men offend with a high hand, and in defiance, as it were, to the Commands of God, and the Checks of their own breaſts; Where they proceed leiſurely, and have ſpace and opportunities to recollect themſelves; Where they continue long in wicked practices, and are deaf to all Admonitions, which ſhould pluck them back; Theſe men contract a very deep guilt; are much harder to be reclaimed; and may reaſonably fear, that they provoke God to withdraw thoſe Aſſiſtances and Reſtraints of Grace, which are neceſſary to their Amendment. And therefore *David* very wiſely prays to be kept * *from preſumptuous Sins, leſt they ſhould get the Dominion over him*, and calls *theſe the Great Offence*, ſuch as is moſt diſpleaſing to Almighty God, and which he will not be eaſily pacified for. And if ſo deep a Remorſe, if ſuch bitter Tears, were thought by St. *Peter* little enough for a Sin of Infirmity;

* Pſal. XIX. 13.

What measure of these must needs be due, where the Will acts more freely, and the Choice of Evil is the Effect of Obstinacy and Perverseness, and a Contempt of our Duty? Certainly the least we can think fit in such wretched Circumstances, is to take good heed, that none of those Qualifications be wanting, in Our Repentance, which rendred that of St. *Peter's* so successful. And therefore the Last thing I shall do upon this occasion, shall be to shew, wherein this Repentance of St. *Peter* is, and ought to be, a Pattern to all returning Sinners.

3. To which purpose I observe, *Thirdly*, that we are bound to imitate Him in these following Particulars.

1. *First*, In ascribing the very Disposition to repent to the Grace and Favour of Almighty God. Some of the Fathers have not unfitly resembled the Crowing of the Cock to the Outward, and the awakening Look, which *Jesus* cast upon St. *Peter* to the Inward, Call to Repentance. By the Outward Call I mean, such as the Preaching of the Word, the Advice of our Friends, the Reproofs of those in Authority, the merciful or the severe Dispensations of

of Providence, inviting or driving men to better Courſes. By the Inward, thoſe kindly and ſeaſonable, and ſecret Operations of the Holy Spirit, which incline and give a right turn to our Minds, and cauſe the Outward means to make a due Impreſſion upon us. Now as the *firſt* Crow of the Cock had no effect upon St. *Peter*, becauſe *Jeſus* did not then turn upon him; ſo theſe Outward Calls are very often unſucceſsful, becauſe not ſeconded and ſent home by that Grace of God, which alone can give them power to prevail for our Reformation. And, as the Efficacy of the *Second* Crowing was immediate and ſtrong, when attended with that rebuking Glance of our Bleſſed Maſter; ſo, where thoſe Outward means are backed with the Inward Influences of the Spirit, there they produce ſudden and wonderful Alterations. For what reaſons God vouchſafes this Inward Call to Some and not to Others, who all partake equally of the Outward Call, is beſt known to his own Infinite Wiſdom. Nor is it now requiſite to enter ſo far into that Enquiry, as we may know. This is ſufficient

for my present purpose, that the *raising men dead in trespasses and Sins*, and quickening them with a Principle of Spiritual and new Life, are described by St. *Paul*, * as Miracles, which nothing less than Almighty Power can do. And therefore, when we feel any Desires and Tendencies to lead better Lives, and forsake our old Sins, let us be sure to lay the first Foundation of our Repentance in Humility. Not fondly imagining, that this Sufficiency is of our selves: but, meekly and with all due Thankfulness, acknowledging in the Language of the same St. *Paul*; that † *we are not able of our selves so much as to think one good thought*, and that it is *God* alone || who *worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure*; that * *by the Grace of God we are what we are*, and that it lies upon Us to take great care, that *his Grace*, *which is bestowed* upon us, *be not in vain.* To which purpose,

* Ephes. I. 19, 20. II. 1, 5.

† 2 Cor. III. 5.

|| Phil. II. 13.

* 1 Cor. XV. 10.

2. *Secondly*, St. *Peter's* Example teaches us, that our Repentance ought to be speedy. He was no sooner made sensible of his fault, but immediately he left the Scene of his Wickedness, broke loose from the Company, that had

had drawn him into it, and betook himſelf to his Prayers and his Tears. And We in like manner, if we would approve our ſelves true Penitents, muſt ſtrike in with the very firſt Convictions of our own minds. We muſt not tamper with our Conſciences, nor ſeek out frivolous Excuſes for deferring our Reformation; but improve the Motions of Grace, and quit all occaſions of Sin; All that Company, All thoſe Pleaſures, or whatever elſe hath been a ſnare to us heretofore, muſt be wholly abandoned. Or (if that cannot be) ſo carefully watched, ſo cautiouſly uſed, that all the Approaches and Paſſes may be guarded and blocked up, where the Tempter hath uſed, or is likely to break in upon us. And This is a thing that will admit of no delay, becauſe the continuing to cheriſh and approve our Sins is the ſame thing in effect with committing them over again. It argues the very ſame diſpoſition ſtill to remain. For he that is loath to part with his Vices, wants nothing but Opportunity to repeat them. And God, who judges us according to the Bent of our Wills, and meaſures the Good or Evil we do, by the

the Degrees of Love or Hatred we bear to Him and Religion, knows very well, that They who put off their Repentance to a further day, are ſtill in *the Gall of Bitterneſs and the Bond of Iniquity.* Men may flatter themſelves, and impoſe upon Others, with I know not what idle Pretences; but He that is ſeriouſly convinced he ought to repent, and does not ſet about it immediately, is not in good earneſt, nor does he ſincerely hate his wicked ways, or heartily intend ever to repent at all.

3. *Thirdly*, The Bitterneſs of St. *Peter's* Weeping inſtructs us, how neceſſary and how Efficacious a branch of Repentance it is, to be deeply and heartily ſorry for our Sins. This is neceſſary, becauſe we have to deal with a God to whom we are not in a condition of bringing any Atonement; and therefore the Only Satisfaction we can make him, is the taking the Shame of our Fault to our ſelves, and being unfeignedly afflicted for all our unworthy behaviour toward him. For which reaſon the *broken and contrite heart* is called in a peculiar manner *God's Sacrifice*, and ſuch an Offering

as

as *he will not deſpiſe.* (Pſal. LI. 17.) And as ſuch Sorrow is Neceſſary, ſo is it likewiſe of great Efficacy in the preſent caſe, becauſe our Care to avoid Sin for the future, will naturally be proportionable to our Concern for having committed it heretofore. Hence are the pious Mourners ſo bleſſed, Hence the ſhootings and ſtinging pains of a wounded Conſcience the greateſt Mercies to the Sufferer; Becauſe ſuch pains are profitable, by begetting an irreconcilable and ſettled averſion againſt the wretched Cauſe of them, and firmer reſolutions to deliver from ſuch ſmart and miſery, by ſeeking the *peaceable fruits of Righteouſneſs* ever after. And, becauſe ſuch inward Reproaches and Anguiſh of Heart, if the degree of This Sorrow be equal, will have the ſame natural Effects with all Other Sorrow; Therefore we are ſo often called upon for the ſame Teſtimonies of it as are uſual under Other Afflictions. Hence we are commanded to * turn to the Lord with *weeping and Mourning*; Hence *David waſhed his bed, and watered his Couch with Tears*, † and Hence God is ſaid *to put ſuch Tears into his bottle* ‖, that

* Joel II. 12.

† Pſal. VI. 6.

‖ Pſal. LVI. 8.

that is, To treaſure them up, and have them in favourable Remembrance; becauſe as St. *Paul* ſays, * *Godly ſorrow worketh Repentance.* Miſtake not (my Friends,) Sorrow is not Repentance, but works it; that is, it is Inſtrumental toward it, and very powerful to produce it. Which leads me to a

* 2 Cor. VII. 10.

Fourth thing, in which if we do not imitate St. *Peter*, all the reſt is of no Significance at all to us; And That is an Effectual Change of Manners, and ſtedfaſt Perſeverance in Holineſs for the time to come. And This will be the natural Conſequence of our Sorrow for Sin, if it be indeed afflicting and ſincere. For No Man thinks he can be too careful to avoid that, which creates him diſquiet; No Man needs be warned to keep at a diſtance from things which he hates and apprehends extream danger, and certain Deſtruction from. If therefore This be our real Senſe of Sin, our Behaviour will be agreeable to it. But, beſides the Obligation, which a due Regard to our own Safety lays upon us, we are likewiſe bound to it in Gratitude

Gratitude to Almighty God. For, Which way can we expreſs our thanks for the ineſtimable mercy of being reſcued out of the Captivity of Sin and Death, ſo well as by living to Him who hath thus loved us? It is not enough in ſuch a caſe, that we refuſe to be entangled again in the ſame Yoke of Bondage. Thus much we owe to our Selves: But to Him who hath *hewed our ſnares in pieces*, we owe a great deal more. The greater our Debt was, the more we muſt teſtify our Affection to the kind Creditor who releaſed it. And This can only be done, by devoting our ſelves as eagerly to the Service of Religion, as ever we had done formerly to that of our Luſts: By ſtemming the Torrent of Profaneneſs and Impiety, and endeavouring with all our might to promote Goodneſs in the World. Particularly by being eminently conſpicuous in thoſe Virtues, which are moſt directly contrary to the Vices we formerly indulged, and by our active indefatigable Charity to the Souls of our Brethren, giving Teſtimony how juſt a value we ſet upon the

the deliverance of our Own, in our mighty care to reſcue Theirs.

Thus far St. *Peter's* Example leads us. But, even when we have followed it thus far, we may not ſuppoſe, that our Pardon and good Acceptance are due to any Deſert of our own Good Works; Or, that our deepeſt Sorrow can (properly ſpeaking) have in it any thing of Satisfaction. For as * St. *Peter's Faith did* therefore *not fail, becauſe Chriſt prayed that it might not*; ſo our Reſtoration and the Efficacy of our Repentance is entirely the Effect of the Merits and Interceſſion of the ſame kind Saviour. He only could take up this quarrel between offended God and ſinful Man; and therefore, when we find God moſt eaſy of Acceſs, and are ſuffered to draw ſo near, as even to be myſtically united to him, and fed by him; let us not forget to beg that the intolerable Burden of our Sins may be removed, not in Preſumption of *our own Righteouſneſs, but in confidence of his manifold and great Mercies:* humbly beſeeching him, *That for his Son*

* Luke XXII. 32.

Son our Lord Jeſus Chriſt's Sake, he would forgive us all that is paſt, and grant that we may ever heareafter ſerve and pleaſe Him In newneſs of Life, To the honour and glory of his holy Name, through the ſame Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SER-

SERMON VII.

THE CERTAINTY AND *Nature of Regeneration.*

St. John III. 8.

The Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth; So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

WHEN we read of *Nicodemus* adventuring to Viſit *Jeſus*, and acknowledging the Conviction his Miracles had wrought upon ſome of the Beholders;

Beholders; that they concluded from hence his Miſſion and Authority to be Divine, it is plain ſomewhat more than mere Curioſity drew him to this Conference. Deſires he had, though as yet but imperfect, of better Inſtruction; but ſuch as they were, our Saviour did not diſdain to gratify them, in entring upon a Diſcourſe concerning the Kingdom of God: That Kingdom, which it was his deſign to bring men to; the Kingdom of that God from whom he came a Teacher. Whether *Nicodemus* had enquired into the Qualifications, requiſite to prepare Men for, and admit them into this Kingdom, we know not; or whether Chriſt of his own accord fell upon This, as a Point the moſt improving, the moſt neceſſary to be firſt underſtood, and moſt pertinent to the purpoſe of ſtealing this Viſit. Nor was it material for St. *John* to acquaint us. That which is of much greater Conſequence is, that he makes a *Man's being born again*, the indiſpenſable Condition of *ſeeing that Kingdom.* (V. 3.) And This deſerves the Greater Attention, becauſe a Maſter in *Iſrael* miſtook it; As if God had intended the Impoſ-

ſibility (or at leaſt our Saviour were ſo abſurd to propoſe it) of going through the Courſe of a Natural Birth the ſecond time. (V. 4.) From that wild Miſconſtruction our Lord delivers himſelf, and explains the Nature of Regeneration. *That Water and the Spirit*, the Waſhing of Baptiſm outwardly, and the inward Sanctifications of the Holy Ghoſt are the Principles by which it is effected. (V. 5.) *That*, Could it be compaſſed in that groſs way *Nicodemus* miſapprehended; yet, that would be of no Efficacy, no Advantage at all in this Caſe. For, ſince in all Productions the thing born receives the Nature and Reſemblance of That, whence its Being was derived; Fleſh could only produce Fleſh. But the new Creature, which God requires, conſiſts in the Mind; and therefore to bring forth a new Spirit, it is neceſſary, that the Vital Principle ſhould be a Spirit. (V. 6.) And, however he might find ſome difficulty in aſſenting to this, becauſe neither the Cauſe, nor the manner of its Operation, fall under the notice of the Bodily Senſes, yet is not that any juſt Exception againſt the Reality of the

Fact;

Fact; A very familiar Inſtance whereof he alledges in the Words of my Text, which are thus introduced by the *ſeventh* Verſe. *Marvel not that I ſaid unto thee, Ye muſt be born again; The Wind bloweth where it liſteth, and thou heareſt the Sound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; ſo is every one that is born of the Spirit.*

The Words plainly conſiſt of two parts, *A Similitude*, and *The Application*; and my Diſcourſe upon them ſhall accordingly diſtribute it ſelf into theſe Two Heads.

First, *From the Similitude I ſhall draw ſome general Concluſions, which may direct us in our Contemplation of Divine Truths, and eſpecially That of Regeneration, which is the Subject Matter of our Lord's Argument with* Nicodemus.

Secondly, *From the Application I ſhall conſider how far the properties of the Wind mentioned here, will give us any juſt ground to judge of the Holy Spirit's workings upon the Souls of Men.*

I. *I begin with ſome General Concluſions drawn from the Similitude it ſelf; ſuch as may direct us in our Contemplation of Divine Truths; and more eſpecially in That of Regeneration, which is the ſubject Matter of our Lord's Argument with* Nicodemus. And theſe Concluſions are as follow.

1. First, *A man may have ſufficient Reaſon to aſſure himſelf that a Thing really is, without being able to give an account how it came to be.* For the Cauſe of a Thing is indeed one, and a very ſatisfactory way, of coming to the diſtinct Knowledge of its Nature. But this is but One way of Many, and Some things, which we cannot come at this way, may be ſo certain to us, that it would be the Extremity of an Obſtinate Singularity to deny them. For as things have Cauſes, ſo have they likewiſe Effects, and Properties, and other Characters, by which they may be diſtinguiſhed. And it is enough in all Conſcience, if any of theſe give Evidence of their exiſting. For we are every whit as ſure, that what hath no Being of its own cannot have Properties and Effects, as we are, that it could never have been without a Cauſe.

And

And therefore, when we are able to aſſign any ſuch Properties or Effects, that is a Demonſtration of the Reality of the Thing. For inſtance, Very Few, if Any, of the moſt Learned, have been able to give a ſatisfactory Account of the Original of Winds, but the Hypotheſis of one Philoſopher, is diſliked and exploded by another. Now though theſe Curious Searchers into Nature cannot agree *whence they come and whither they go*; yet herein they all agree, that *come* and *go* they do. This they know without any ſearch; And the unlettered part of the World, who have neither Capacity, nor Leiſure, for nice Enquiries, believe it as firmly, and know it as aſſuredly, as They. In like manner, if there be certain Marks, by which a Man *born of the Spirit* is evidently diſcerned, and diſtinguiſhed from another that is not ſo born; We may from thoſe Marks conclude, that ſuch a Man is Regenerate, though we could not poſitively determine from whence this Principle of new Life took its riſe: Or if we knew, as know we may, that it could be owing to no other Cauſe but the

Operations of the Holy Ghoſt; we may then, where ſuch Marks appear, be confident that the ſanctifying Operations of the Holy Ghoſt have paſſed upon that Perſon, though neither We who were Standers-by, nor perhaps the Man himſelf, was conſcious of the Manner, in which they were begun, and carried on in his mind.

2. Secondly, *A thing may be ſufficiently perceivable One way, which is not at all ſo in another.* For in all Objects of Knowledge, there is ſomething of Agreement and Proportion betwixt that Object and the Organ or Faculty that is contrived to apprehend it; and upon this mutual Suitableneſs depends the Perception. Thus it is with our Bodily Senſes; Each of them have parts fitted for receiving ſuch Impreſſions as are proper to their purpoſe; and the Qualities of Bodies are not applied to All theſe parts indifferently; but ſeverally to Each; as Each is by Nature accommodated for the entertaining, and making a Report of them to the Soul. Thus we do not hear Colours, nor ſee Perfumes, nor ſmell Sounds; and yet we are as fully ſatisfied, that there are Sounds,

Sounds, though we hear them only, as if we ſaw and ſmelt them too. To the ſame purpoſe it is, that our Saviour argues in the Text. A Man ſees not either any Shape, or any Motion, of the Wind it ſelf; All that he knows of this kind, is only the motion of other Bodies agitated by it; And yet he makes no difficulty to allow, that *it blows, when he hears the ſound of it*; becauſe the Wind is not an Object proportioned to the Eye, but the noiſe of it is to the Ear; and therefore he receives the Teſtimony of that Senſe, which has a Competent Knowledge, without troubling himſelf, that this is not confirmed by the other Senſes, which are incapable of knowing any thing, in the matter. This is the force of the Alluſion, and that which by Parity of Reaſon ariſes from it is this. That the Caſe is the ſame between the Intellectual Faculties and the Senſitive in general, with that betwixt One Senſe and Another. And, if we acknowledge a thing's Reality when we hear the Sound, but ſee no Shape of it; becauſe it is in Nature fitted to affect our Hearing, but not our Sight; There is the ſame Reaſon, why we

ſhould aſſent, to what our Underſtanding can apprehend, though our Senſes do not; if it be of that kind, which may give evidence to the mind, and make it ſelf underſtood; though it cannot make it ſelf ſeen, or heard, or felt by us. Now a Spirit cannot work upon the outward Organs, which can never be moved by any other Impreſſions than thoſe of Body and Matter; But if by help of Meditation, by laying and comparing things together, and conſidering the Conſequences that naturally reſult from them, we find that ſuch a thing there is, and ſuch Footſteps there are of its Working, we then may and ought to reſt ſatisfied, both of the Exiſtence, and the Operation of that Spirit. Becauſe we have the Evidence proper for the Condition of the thing; ſuch as it is capable of; And the Intellectual Faculties of the Mind, were intended by God for Helps and Inſtruments of attaining Knowledge, no leſs than the Senſitive Organs of the Body. Different Objects require different Perceptions; and * St. *Paul* hath obſerved it, as an Ornament and Excellence, rather than any Imperfection of Humane Nature,

* 1 Cor. XII.

Nature, that the ſeveral Parts have their ſeveral Offices allotted to them.

3. *Thirdly*, It is implyed by this Similitude, that *ſome things are capable of being known by the Effects, which we cannot come to the Knowledge of any other way.* No man need go far for Proof of This. *Intùs habes quod poſcis.* We all are ſure, that we carry ſomewhat about us which we call a Soul. Somewhat that thinks, and deliberates, and chuſes, that imagines, and judges, and remembers; that fears, and hopes, and loves, and hates, and deſires, and refuſes, and grieves, and rejoyces, according to the different Apprehenſions we receive, of the Objects about which we are converſant. This we know from our own Feeling and Experience: And yet the Wiſeſt of us all do not know the time when, or the manner how, this Soul was created, and united to our Bodies, nor a Thouſand Difficulties more, which might be ſtarted; but yet ſtagger not any reaſonable Man's aſſent; becauſe he is ſatisfied, that theſe Effects muſt have a Cauſe adequate to them. So likewiſe Our Saviour takes for granted, that the noiſe and Sound

was

was Proof ſufficient that the Wind blows; the ſhakings and rattlings of Boughs, the raiſing Storms at Sea, the tearing up Trees, and rocking of Houſes, All convince us, that the Air is in a Violent Agitation; and yet we are not privy to the firſt beginnings of it. We cannot tell what raiſed this mighty Ferment, nor where it ſet out, nor how far it intends, nor what becomes of it when it ceaſes. The Mariners are ſure they are carried up to the Heaven, and down again to the deep; they ſee the Waves boil and foam like a Pot, and feel their Veſſel ſtagger like a drunken Man; and they doubt not to conclude the Wind is the doer of it, without ever diſputing, how it was able to diſturb the face of the Deep, or blow up the Waters into ſuch Rage and Tumult. And it is here urged to *Nicodemus*, as a thing equally agreeable to Reaſon, that men ſhould ſubmit to the Belief of a Second Birth, if the Effects of that Birth appear, though the Cauſe and Progreſs of it do not. For inſtance, St. *John* ſays, *He* * *that doth Righteouſneſs is born of God, in this the Children of God are manifeſt, and the Children*

* 1 John III. 9, 10.

Children of the Devil. St. *Paul* acquaints us, That * *the New Creature is Faith which worketh by Love*; † that *the Fruits of the Spirit are Love, Joy, Peace, Long-ſuffering, Gentleneſs, Goodneſs, Faith, Meekneſs, and Temperance:* We are likewiſe told, ‖ *That it is God, who worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleaſure.* Now from hence it follows moſt undeniably, that let Moral Duties be never ſo much diſparaged, as mean and low, and Legal; Yet whereſoever we ſee any Man living Righteouſly; where we find ſuch a mixture of Faith and Charity, and all that bright Conſtellation of Virtues mentioned juſt now; we may and ought to pronounce that Man *born of the Spirit.* For though the Tree be not viſible to us, yet the Fruits are; and ſince thoſe Practices are the Genuine Product of the Influences of the Spirit, and cannot be produced from any other Principle; to attribute them to Nature, or to any thing beſides, is in effect to ſay, *that Grapes may be gathered of Thorns; and Figs of Thiſtles.* For it is *this good Tree alone that can bring forth thoſe good Fruits.* And if by the Fruits it were not ſufficiently

* Gal. V. 6. VI. 15.
† Gal. V. 22.
‖ Phil. II. 13.

to

to be known, our Saviour would never have confirmed, nor the Common Senſe of Mankind have agreed, in making Good and Evil Actions, an infallible Character, whereby to diſtinguiſh the Spirits and Principles from whence they flow.

And a neceſſary Conſequence of this Particular is, That if ſuch Good Practices, where they are conſpicuous, declare that they are wrought by the Spirit, and that God hath renewed that Man, and did, and does ſtill, act and dwell in him: Then it is no leſs certain, that where the Contrary Vices and Diſpoſitions are predominant, thoſe men are not Regenerate, nor does the Spirit of God work in them. *Let no man deceive you* (ſays the Apoſtle) * *whoſoever doth not righteouſneſs is not of God, neither he that loveth not his Brother.* Men may delude themſelves and their ignorant Followers, with boaſting pretences; they may have the Impiety even to ſanctify their blackeſt Crimes, by fathering them upon Divine Impulſe and Inſpiration: But, while we ſee them turbulent and factious, proud and diſobedient, cenſorious and bitter, unjuſt and uncharitable, can we think that

* 1 John III. 10.

that God is the Author of, or dwells with theſe froward Diſpoſitions? It were a Contradiction to all Religion to ſuppoſe ſo; and, however they may be exalted by their own vain Imaginations, yet alas! *they know not* themſelves, nor *what Spirit they are of.*

4. There is yet a *Fourth* Conſideration eaſy to be gathered from the Similitude before us, which is, That *when once we know all that is needful for our purpoſe, we ought to make the beſt Improvement of that; and not raiſe Miſts, and perplex our Minds, and neglect our Duty, by indulging unprofitable Enquiries after what we cannot, or need not, know.* The End of all Knowledge, whether Natural or Revealed, is not Curioſity but Uſe; And while we want no degree that may be ſerviceable, it is not only Folly, but Impiety, to dwell upon Niceties, and mere Speculations. Let us put the Caſe, that a Pilot, or a Husbandman, were admitted into the dark Caverns of the Earth, and ſaw Vapours there engender into Winds; What Benefit would Humane Life receive from any Intelligence he could bring from thence? Could ſuch a one

ſwell

ſwell his Sails, or make more way with a Convenient Gale? Could he bid the Tempeſts be ſtill, or ſmooth the face of the Deep, for being let into this Secret? Could the Farmer ſecure his Fruits from a Blaſt, any more than he can now? The ſame Methods would ſtill obtain in each Profeſſion, and the ſame degrees of Efficacy they would have. Why ſhould it not be ſo in Religion too? The Cauſes when ſeen would be the ſame they are now; Our Knowledge could not add new Force and Vigour, but they muſt act neither more nor leſs than they do unſeen. Could we diſtinctly feel and ſee, and make Reflections upon our Second Birth, this would profit us no more, the want of it can prejudice us no more, than it does in the Natural. The Infant is perfectly in the dark, while he is in the Womb; He knows not what is doing, when the Embryo is formed, and nouriſhed there; He comes to Maturity and ſtruggles for Freedom, and forces his Paſſage into the World, without being ſenſible why, or how, this is done. When he arrives at the uſe of Reaſon, he hath not the leaſt Remembrance of this

this kind; yet Nature keeps her Courſe, and performs her Charge faithfully and with great Exactneſs, and All he can collect is, that he is born a Man; And This he is infallibly ſure of, becauſe he lives, and moves, and acts as a Man. In like manner the Children of God know they are born of Him, becauſe they govern themſelves by a Spiritual and Divine Principle. And this they do, not one whit the leſs, notwithſtanding they cannot enter into the Cauſes and Methods of this Birth. The Efficient Cauſe they know was the Spirit, and could be none elſe; and the Dignity of His Perſon is the Conſideration, which muſt deterr them from reſiſting his Motions, and doing deſpight to his Grace, and quenching that Life he hath given them. They can ſhow all the Signs of ſuch a Birth; the meek and Dove-like Diſpoſition; the pious and Heavenly Converſation, which none, but They who are of God, can have. And the Advantages at laſt will be the ſame too. For, as the Husbandman gathers in that Corn, which, though of his own ſowing, comes up he knows not how; ſo they *who ſow*

to

Galat. VI. 8. *to the Spirit, ſhall of the Spirit reap life Everlaſting*, though they underſtand not all the myſterious ways, by which they were enabled to grow in Grace and put forth the precious fruits of righteouſneſs.

Well were it if theſe few Conſiderations were duly weighed, and diſcreetly obſerved: They would reſtrain that bold and buſy temper, that inſolent licentious arguing, which under colour of Reaſon and free Thinking, brings holy Myſteries into Contempt, and ſhipwracks numbers of unwary Souls. Thoſe divine Truths above our Comprehenſion would then be received with Meekneſs, or at leaſt diſputed with Modeſty; For, though we cannot fathom this Abyſs, yet it comes to us confirmed with proper Teſtimonies, and ſuch as, *How can theſe things be?* does by no means confute or weaken. This *Nicodemus* urged to Chriſt, againſt a Spiritual and Second Birth, and yet our Lord did not allow the Objection. Nay, even this Birth it ſelf hath ſuffered too, and been ill repreſented, by daring Attempts of Men, who have undertaken to ſhew the manner of it, and ſpeak very poſitively, where God was ſilent. In Oppoſition

Oppoſition to whoſe dangerous Errors, I ſhall now come to my

II. *Second* Head, and from the *Application* will conſider, *how far the Properties of the Wind mentioned in this Similitude, will give us any juſt ground to judge of the Holy Spirit's workings upon the minds of men.* The Application is contained in the laſt Clauſe of the Verſe, *So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* That is; The work of Regeneration carries great Reſemblance to what is obſerved of the Wind; for as There we gather its Blowing, from the Sound and other Effects; though we do not ſee the Blaſt, nor its Riſe and Paſſage, nor are acquainted with the Cauſe that ſets it on: So may a Child of God know he is ſuch, by the Effects and Characters of that Relation; though he do not ſee the Spirit that renews him, though the Operations by which he is renewed be ſuch, as fall not under the Obſervation of his outward Senſes, nor is perhaps his own mind conſcious to many things, by which that Change is wrought in him.

1. And *firſt*, From that Expreſſion, *The Wind bloweth where it liſteth*, we

may I think, fairly infer the Freedom of God's Grace. That he gives it liberally, and of his own accord, and that it is what no Merit of ours can oblige him to give. In this Argument St. *Paul* hath laboured much, * shewing that the very notion of Grace and the nature of it is contrary to that of Works and of Debt. That *Abraham*, the Father and the Pattern of the Faithful, received the Call and Promise of God, while he was yet among Idolaters, and could have no Works to boast of; That, when Jews and Gentiles were both concluded under Sin, God chose the Gentiles, as he did *Jacob* before *Esau*, freely while yet in the Womb; Not that the One of these had any wrong done him, or was used worse than he deserved; but the Other found great Favour, and was used better than he deserved; And so the Chosen ought to be thankful and rejoyce, but the Rejected could not complain, nor had he any thing to accuse God of. Thus it is also in the Work of Regeneration. God gives us his preventing Graces freely; He imparts the Light of his Gospel, and it is a marvellous Blessing to be born and educated

*Rom. XI, IV, IX, Chapters.

educated in thoſe happy Regions, which are enlightned with the pure Luſtre of it. When we believe this Goſpel, it's his Grace that diſpoſes our minds to do ſo; When that Faith exerts it ſelf in Works of Obedience, This alſo is owing to the Aſſiſtances of his Grace. When we improve to higher excellencies, and approach nearer to the Perfections of a Spiritual and Divine Life, This is again from the more abundant Communications of the ſame Grace. 'Tis true indeed, Chriſt hath engaged to give an increaſe of *Talents to Them* who make a good Uſe of the * Talents they already have; He hath aſſured us, that our † *Heavenly Father will not fail to grant the holy Spirit to them that ask him:* But ſtill it is by the Aid and Influence of that very Spirit, that we ask the Talents we have not, and that we improve thoſe we have. So that This does but enhance God's Mercy and Bounty ſo much the more, which firſt enables us to act, and then rewards us for acting; For that is in effect to crown and compleat His Own Work, rather than Our Deſert; ſince what we do acquires a Title to his Promiſe, and yet it is

* Matth. XXV. 29.
† Luke XI. 13.

what we could not do, if He did not impart to us the Power of doing it.

There is indeed another Senſe of this Expreſſion fixed upon by an * Interpreter of Note, which is, that the Spirit of God blows upon mens minds, in ſo gentle a manner, as not to take away the liſtings of them, but leaves the Will the ſame Exerciſe of its Freedom, though in Conjunction with, and under the Conduct of, Grace. But This, if I miſtake not, though it be deducible from the Text, ſeems rather to be implied in that other Paſſage, *Thou canſt not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth.* By which I conceive we are led to a

* *Cajetan.*

2. *Second* Reflection concerning the manner of the Spirit's working upon our minds, which is, That, As we can give no account of the Riſe, the increaſe, the quieting of the Wind, where it began, where it will ſtop, or how long it will laſt; So the Operations of the Spirit are many times very remote from our Underſtanding. He may move us without our having any diſtinct Perception of the thing; nor can we always ſay, Then the impulſe began, thus long it continued, and now

now it ceaſes to move me. And this cannot ſeem very ſtrange to any, that ſhall conſider, by what ſteps he hath come off from a wicked Life, or proceeded in a Good one. For in all This he will find nothing of Violence or External Compulſion, but ſuch Motives all along as were entirely agreeable to his Faculties, and the Methods by which he proceeds in other Caſes. For did not this Change begin with a Conviction of Sin, and the Evil of it, and conſequent hereunto a Hatred and Deteſtation ground upon ſuch Argument, as theſe; that it is contrary to Reaſon, diſpleaſing to God, deſtructive to Soul and Body, in rendring Both obnoxious to the Divine Wrath and Vengeance, and that Eternity of Miſery, which the preſent fleeting Pleaſures of Wickedneſs are a very poor and ſilly Exchange for? Again, Will not his Advance in Vertue be found to owe it ſelf, to the Contemplation of the Beauty, the Reaſonableneſs, the Advantages of Holineſs, the Alluring Rewards it propoſes, the Happineſs it ſecures in this Life and the next? How then did Theſe Arguments prevail at laſt? Was it not by

frequent Meditation, by insinuating themselves into the Mind by degrees, by the common Methods of Reading, or Hearing, and weighing God's word; by vanquishing the prejudices of our corrupt Hearts, by discussing and displaying the Evidence of Truth, by faithful and honest Application; by exciting good desires, strengthening those Desires with Holy Resolutions, and making good these Resolutions by diligent Endeavours and stedfast Perseverance? But still the Finger of God is in all This. It is He, that brings these Considerations into our hearts at first. He, that fastens them upon us when they are there; He, that adds new Life and Vigour to our Desires and Intentions, and gives Efficacy and Success to our, otherwise Weak and imperfect, Attempts. He convinces our Judgments, kindles good Inclinations, persuades, allures, threatens, deterrs; terrifies, reproaches; comforts, commends; and performs all other Offices necessary to Piety; But these he performs *in* us, and *with* us, and *by* us. From Him, as we acknowledge in our daily Prayers, all *holy desires*, all *good counsels*, and all *just works* proceed;

ceed; But they proceed from Him in ſuch a manner, as ſtill to be *our* deſires, *our* counſels, and *our* works. We know we cannot come to *Chriſt except the Father draw us*, and therefore we are ſure, that as many as come are drawn: But then they are drawn by the Cords of a Man; invited and wrought upon by the dictates of Reaſon, by the Inſtructions and Exhortations of God's Word, by the Admonitions and Checks of their own Conſciences; In a manner ſuitable to their Rational Nature and Faculties, in a way that requires their own Cooperation and Conſent; and the more Men work the more God will work with them. In a word, the Spirit acts in the Nature of an Aſſiſtant againſt our Infirmities, but not as an Undertaker of the Work, or a Bearer of the whole Burden; And all he does is by Infuſions ſo gentle, ſo ſweet, ſo ſecret, ſo tender, as to fall in with our own thoughts. And if Scripture had not declared all the Good we do to be from God, we could not many times diſtinguiſh between the Motions of His Spirit, and thoſe of Our own. That thus it is, both Reaſon, and Ex-

perience, and (which is moſt of all) Revelation abundantly inform us. Hence men are ſaid to be * *ſanctified by the Word, of God, and by the Waſhing of Water*, and to be ‖*ſanctified by the Holy Ghoſt*. Why? Becauſe the Spirit of God is the Author and Finiſher, and the Word and Sacraments are the Means and Inſtruments, of our Sanctification. † *God* is ſaid to *beget men to a Spiritual Life*; and the * Miniſters of the Goſpel are ſaid to *beget* them alſo: And very properly both; for We apply Arguments, and God renders them effectual; Our People attend to thoſe Arguments, and God gives them the power of Perſwaſion, and ſets them home, and fixes them upon their minds, and thus conveys to them a Principle of Spiritual Life, by the Mediation of Our Miniſtry. God promiſes to give Sinners † a *new heart*, and he commands Sinners to make themſelves a ‖ *new heart*. And what can any reaſonable Reader gather from this, but that the Renewing of our Souls is wrought by the Concurrence of Almighty God with our own Endeavours? St. *Paul* declares, himſelf * *laboured more abundantly than all the Apoſtles*;

* John XVII. 17. Epheſ. V. 26.
‖Rom XV. 16.
† 1 Pet. I. 3.
* 1 Cor. IV. 15.
† Ezek. XVIII. 31.
‖ Ezek. XXXVI. 26.
* 1 Cor. XV. 10.

Apoſtles; and yet declares in the ſame Breath, that *it was not He, but the Grace of God, which was with him.* The plain and natural Conſequence whereof is, that the Labour was His, but the Power, and the Glory, and the Succeſs of it, God's. The ſame Apoſtle exhorts the *Philippians*, * *to work out their own Salvation*, becauſe it *is God, that worketh in them both to will, and to do, of his good Pleaſure.* And wherein lies the force and fitneſs of that Motive, except in This? that Something We muſt do, or God will do Nothing; but, that All We can do will ſignify Nothing, except God came in to our Aſſiſtance, and do Something too.

* Phil. II. 12, 13.

The Point before us may be farther confirmed by the various Conſtructions of the word *Spirit* in the New Teſtament. Which is ſometimes oppoſed to the *Fleſh*, ſometimes to the *Letter* and the *Law*; Sometimes it ſignifies the outward Miniſtration of the Goſpel; Sometimes the inward Perſwaſions of Grace in our Hearts. And the beſt Inference I know of from this Ambiguity of Expreſſion, is, that leading a Life of Reaſon, and Purity, in

in Oppoſition to our Brutiſh and Carnal Luſts; living a Life of Faith in Oppoſition to the Law of Ceremonies and Confidence in our own Works; governing our ſelves by the written Word of God, and obſerving the directions and good motions of the Spirit of God within us, mean and come all to the ſame thing at laſt; that He who does the One, does the Other alſo; and *Walking in the Spirit*, and *living after the Spirit*, include them all, in which ſoever of theſe Senſes you interpret it. Now theſe are Matters, in which, when we are excited to them, nothing farther is diſcernible by Us, than the Reſolutions and the Probity of our own minds; but, from comparing theſe Texts, it manifeſtly appears, that God is all the while behind the Curtain, and works ſtrongly, though he work unſeen.

And, Methinks, it ought by no means to ſeem an incredible thing, that He, who made our Minds, and ſtamped his own Image upon them, ſhould be ſo intimate with theſe Minds of Ours, as to communicate whatever Influences he ſees fit, without being neceſſitated to make uſe of our Bodily Organs,

Organs, or any ſuch groſs Means, as muſt fall under the notice of our Senſes. We know, our own Soul moves us, and yet we do not feel it by any Impulſe, that makes a ſenſible Impreſſion upon this outward Structure: Nor can we ſay, how this Motion is conveyed from an Immaterial to the fineſt Corporeal Subſtance: How That commands ſo powerfully, and every part of This obeys ſo readily. Surely then He, who created Soul and Body both, and found a way to move Matter, by that which is not Matter, cannot want Methods of making His Spirit correſpond with Ours (the Spirit creating with that created by it) no nor of carrying on this Correſpondence in ſo eaſy and familiar a manner, that We our ſelves, when blown upon from above, ſhall not be able to diſcern diſtinctly, *whence this Wind cometh, and whither it goeth.* I will juſt mention ſome Inferences which ſeem undeniably to follow from the former Arguments, and ſo conclude.

1. And *Firſt*, This ſhews the Error of thoſe men, who require it, as a mark of Grace to aſſign the Inſtant of ones own Converſion. For in ſo doing

ing they ſuppoſe ſeveral things which contradict what hath been delivered, and cannot, as I preſume, ſtand with our Saviour's meaning in the Text. They muſt ſuppoſe, That the work of Converſion was wrought in an Inſtant; That the manner of effecting it was by ſtrong and ſenſible Impreſſions, ſuch as the Party muſt needs be conſcious of; That it was a Violent as well as a ſudden Change; And thus they raiſe this Wind up into a Hurricane, that ſhall carry men forcibly from a State of Sin, to a State of Grace: They make it a motion in which men are purely paſſive; for all this is implied, in the Blowing of ſuch a Wind, as men will not content themſelves with the Sound of, to be ſatisfied of its Truth, but require an account *whence it cometh, and whither it goeth?* And laſtly, they ſtretch this Metaphor of a Second Birth too far; and make that ſignify the Manner of the Operation, which is only intended to import the Greatneſs of the Change.

Secondly, What went before deſerves to be well conſidered, becauſe if it were ſo, it would make men very careful not to reſiſt any of the good Motions,

tions, nor go againſt the Senſe and Chidings, of their own Breaſts. *Quenching*, and *Grieving*, and *Reſiſting*, and *Doing Deſpight to the Spirit of God*, are what moſt People ſeem to have a great Dread and Abhorrence of; but the misfortune is, that they often commit theſe Crimes, without being aware that they do ſo. Should God in a Clap of Thunder, bid the Sinner hold his hand, it is probable the ſturdieſt of them all would not dare to proceed in a wicked Act; Should he ſtrike every man to the Ground with ſuch a dazzling Light as he did St. *Paul*, They would (it is to be hoped) preſently ask with Him, *Lord what wilt thou have one to do?* But as it is, They ſee no viſible Tokens of the Divinity, and therefore they regard not his Calls. Now God by the Manifeſtation of himſelf to *Elijah*, ſhewed that *He was in the Still ſmall voice*, though not in the ſtrong *Wind nor the Earthquake*, nor *the Fire*. And if his Spirit mingle it ſelf with our Thoughts, If (as hath been ſaid) it act upon us by the outward Miniſtry of the Word, by the inward Dictates and Reaſon-

Reaſonings of our minds; If the Effects only of his working be viſible, but the Manner of it imperceptible; Then every Admonition from the Pulpit, Every wholſome Law, Every Advice from a Friend or a Parent, Every good Book, Every pious Example, Every Motion and Intention to do well, Every Conviction or Check of our own Conſcience, is a *Blowing of this Wind*, a Call, or Impulſe from above; And as often as any Man refuſes to comply with theſe things, ſo often he reſiſts God, and quenches his Spirit within himſelf.

Thirdly, This ſhews us, what Courſe men ſhould take, in order to get, or to grow in Grace; For ſince God works by and with his Ordinances; our Buſineſs muſt be to uſe the Word and Sacraments, and other means of Grace diligently; to ſeek him there, to put to the Shoulder, and do Our Part reſolutely and manfully, and then not doubt his Aſſiſtance. For upon theſe Terms, we may depend upon it, that He will forward and ſtrengthen our good Intentions; and (ſince he creates all our Works in us,) that

that he will not fail to finish what he himself hath begun, but will perform, and continue it until the Day of Christ Jesus; and in that day for his Sake and Merits, will most assuredly crown Us and our Labours with Everlasting Glory.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SER-

SERMON VIII.

THE *Conditions and Privileges* OF THE SECOND BIRTH.

St. John I. 12, 13.

As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name:
Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the Flesh, nor of the will of Man, but of God.

THE Evangelist, after having in the beginning of the Chapter, with great Exactness, declared the Eternal Divinity of the Word of

of God, and, that This was the very Perſon teſtified of by the Baptiſt, (by which we are aſſured, that this Word, is no other than Jeſus Chriſt the Son of God incarnate;) and having likewiſe ſpoken of his coming into the World, he mentions here with what different ſucceſs he did it. Some, that were more peculiarly obliged, and moſt nearly related to him, from whom an honourable Reception might moſt reaſonably be expected, gave him no Reſpect, no Entertainment at all. And this was the caſe of the perverſe *Jews*, whom God had laid his hand upon, and ſingled out from the reſt of Mankind, for which reaſon they are called in the 11th *Verſe*, τὰ ἴδια, his proper Poſſeſſion. Chriſt's being refuſed there was an indignity, like that of a Man's being driven, or ſhut out of his Demeſnes or Dwelling-houſe. *He came to his own, and his own received him not.* The *Loſs* however was not His but Theirs; in denying Him they denied their own Happineſs; which was ſo great, ſo evident, that St. *John* thought no other expreſſion of their Miſery and Puniſhment was needful,

than only to deſcribe the Privileges of thoſe who behaved themſelves more kindly and dutifully to him. And this is done in the Text it ſelf, *But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God, even to them that believe on his Name; Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* For the right underſtanding and due Improvement whereof, it will be expedient to conſider the following Particulars.

Firſt, The Perſons who alone are capable of Benefit by Chriſt's coming into the World, *They who receive him, and believe on his Name.*

Secondly, The Nature of that Benefit which they obtain by ſo doing, *To them he gives power to become the Sons of God.*

Thirdly, The manner how this Sonſhip is conferred, *They are born not of blood, nor of the will of the Fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*

Fourthly, The Extent of this Privilege, he gives it to *as many as receive, and believe on him.*

I. The

I. The *First* thing, we are concerned to know upon this occaſion, is, Who thoſe Perſons are to whom the Advantages of Chriſtianity belong, or What that Condition is which muſt qualify men for the Benefits of Chriſt's coming into the World; This the Text hath expreſſed in thoſe words, who *receive him*, and *believe on his Name*. Now theſe are Terms explanatory of one another; And, as the *Jews* are therefore ſaid not to have *received him*, becauſe they *believed him not*, but rejected his Authority and Doctrine: So Faith in what he hath revealed, and Obedience to what he hath commanded, are the Marks and Means of our receiving him. And Theſe conſiſt, not in a mere giving him the hearing, and forbearing all publick and malicious Oppoſition to his word; but in acknowledging the Truth and the Evidence of it; depending upon his Promiſes, expecting Salvation from that Name and no other, and diligently endeavouring to perform all that is required on our part; All, that, according to the Covenant of the Goſpel, can any way contribute to the rendring what he

hath done and ſuffered effectual in our own particular Caſe.

That This muſt needs be the meaning of the Phraſe is manifeſt to any man who will conſider it cloſely. For *to receive* Chriſt is to receive him as he is, to ſubmit to him in all thoſe Capacities, which God hath placed him over us in. To receive him as our *Prophet* implies a firm Adherence to the whole of that Meſſage, which he hath brought us from Heaven, to own his Divine Commiſſion, and be inſtructed by him. To receive him as our *Prieſt*, is to rely upon his moſt meritorious Sacrifice, to confeſs the Sufficiency of his Atonement, and to deteſt and forſake thoſe Sins, for which he hath made ſo perfect, but withal ſo ſevere and painful, an Expiation. To receive him as our *King*, is to own his Legiſlative Power, to pay him ſtrict Fidelity and Allegiance, to bring all our Paſſions and Intereſts under Subjection to his Will, and ſuffer no rebellious Appetites to raiſe wicked Seditions, or tempt us to Unfaithfulneſs and Diſloyalty againſt him.

The

The ſame is likewiſe neceſſarily conſequent upon *Believing*; For, ſince the Object of all Faith is Credible Teſtimony, and that of Religious Faith is Divine Revelation, He, who acts, or entertains Perſuaſions contrary to, or derogating from, what God hath declared in Chriſt, cannot properly be called a Believer on his Name. If therefore God hath made ſomething elſe neceſſary, beſides a bare Aſſent of the mind to the Truth of his Doctrines; All That muſt needs come within the compaſs, and be included under the notion, of Faith. If the Evangeliſt tell us in one place, as he does here particularly, that by *believing* men acquire the Privilege of becoming *Sons of God*, and *are born of God*; and yet our Saviour ſays poſitively in another (as in the Third of this Goſpel at the fifth Verſe, we find he does) that *Except a man be born again of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God*, it is very plain, that this Belief muſt be ſuch as is accompanied with, and evidenced by a ſolemn entring into Covenant with God by Baptiſm. And He who reſts upon a naked Belief, and will not be

baptized when he may, expects in vain, that God will reckon him among his Children, or admit him to any part of his Inheritance; after having ſo peremptorily declared, that ſuch a one is none of his, nor in any Condition of entring into his Kingdom. And ſo in general, If, to acknowledging the truth of the Scriptures, and confeſſing the Sufferings, the Nature, the Exaltation of Chriſt; In a word, If to the moſt Orthodox Opinions that ever were or can be, we are commanded by the Word of God to add the reverent Obſervation of Divine Ordinances, devout Prayer, frequent receivings of the Sacrament, and all manner of Vertue and Innocency of Life; He who neglects Theſe, and puts Confidence in his Underſtanding or Owning the Principles of Religion, builds upon a ſandy and deceitful bottom; His hope is that of Hypocrites, and will at laſt loſe both it ſelf and Him that cheriſhes it.

And the Reaſon of theſe things is very obvious. For the Redemption of the World by Chriſt is an arbitrary Act in God, an Act of Free Mercy;

Mercy: As ſuch, it is what no Collections of Natural Light, or Moral Juſtice can give us any Apprehenſion at all of. Conſequently we can enter no farther into the grounds, and manner of it, than He who did it of his own accord thinks fit to let us into. Conſequently again, we are bound to take the Manifeſtations of it entire, Not to parcel them out, as we ſee convenient, and ſo make One Clauſe of this Indenture repugnant to and deſtructive of Another. No reaſonings of our own are of any weight in this Caſe, any further than they are juſtified by Revelation, by the natural Senſe of ſome Text of Scripture, and by the general deſign of the Chriſtian Diſpenſation. Now the very ſame Spirit which ſays, * *We are ſaved by Grace through Faith*, hath informed us by the Miniſtry of the ſelf-ſame Pen, that † *in Chriſt Jeſus neither Circumciſion availeth any thing, nor Uncircumciſion, but faith which worketh by Love.* He hath commanded us to ‖ *follow peace with all men, and holineſs*, as things, *without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.* He hath drawn a black Catalogue of the Works of the Fleſh,

* Epheſ. II. 8.

† Galat. V. 6.

‖ Heb. XII. 14.

and moſt ſolemnly aſſured us, that
* Galat. V. 19, 20, 21. *they who are guilty of* * *Adultery, Fornication, Uncleanneſs, Laſciviouſneſs, Idolatry, Witchcraft, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Hereſies, Envyings, Murders, Drunkenneſs, Revellings, and ſuch like, ſhall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

Is it not now as clear as the Sun, that the Man who truſts to any Faith, except ſuch a Faith, as *worketh by Love*, leans upon a broken Reed? Hath any man reaſon to think his Confeſſing Chriſt will ſave him, who takes no care of either *Peace* or *Holineſs*, and allows himſelf in thoſe Abominations juſt now mentioned? Can he be called a Believer, who diſhonours his Profeſſion by a ſcandalous Life? or eſteemed a Son of God, who cannot ſee his face, nor inherit his Kingdom? It were moſt abſurd to think, moſt blaſphemous to ſay ſo. The receiving Chriſt is much another thing than theſe men make it. I have already ſaid, It is not One ſimple Act of the Will, or the Underſtanding; but a large and a permanent thing, an embracing his Doctrines in their juſt extent, and ſubmitting to all the Conſequences of them

them in our Converſations. 'Tis to preſerve a Harmony and punctual Agreement between the ſeveral parts of them; that Faith and Virtue, Promiſes and Precepts, may go hand in hand, and not be ſet in array to fight againſt and deſtroy each other. And thus it muſt needs be. For He that is otherwiſe perſwaded, acts contrary to this Rule, builds without a Foundation, he forms a New Goſpel of his own, and does not *Believe* but *Preſume*. In ſhort, God cannot away with theſe partial Proceedings, theſe conſultings with Fleſh and Blood; He will not have his own Inſtitution, the nobleſt and moſt compleat that ever was, to be mangled and defaced; And thoſe very *Jews*, who ſhut Chriſt out, and would not receive him at all, are not more wicked and inexcuſable, than the pretended Chriſtians, who receive him by halves, and, under the Cover of this Profeſſion, affront, and deform, and diſhonour him and his Goſpel. Far be it from us to imagine, that God will ſo far proſtitute his mercies, as to admit ſuch wretches to the incomparable Advantage mentioned in my Text; They

may

may uſurp a Title that is not theirs, but the Obedient and Virtuous *Believers*, the Pious and the Reſpectful *Receivers* of Chriſt, Theſe alone are the Perſons who *receive* him as Chriſt, and to them only he *gives power to become the Sons of God.* Which is the Benefit mentioned in the Words, and the Second Head of my Diſcourſe upon them.

II. Thoſe who have Criticized nicely upon this Paſſage, make great Remarks upon the Evangeliſt's cautious manner of expreſſing himſelf in it. They tell us, It would have been leſs proper to have ſaid, that Chriſt made us become the Sons of God, becauſe this would have ſeemed an Act of Omnipotence and Neceſſity, ſuch as might have been interpreted in prejudice to the Freedom of our Will, and that part which we our ſelves contribute to our own Regeneration. Nor had it been equally prudent to ſay, that he gave us power to make our ſelves the Sons of God, becauſe this had exalted our Faculties as much too high, and depreſt the Bounty of God, and the Honour he hath done us, as if any Performances of Ours could

deſerve

deſerve or procure this Sonſhip. But by ſaying, he gave us *power to become the Sons of God*, both theſe Inconveniences, they think, are ſaved. The Mercy is ſtill repreſented in it's due proportion, in that this Honourable Relation is a Grace, and our Advances toward it not a Meritorious Cauſe, but a Qualification only. And the Liberty of our Actions is ſtill implyed, in that he gave us only a power of obtaining, what yet we might not obtain, if we refuſed, or neglected to exert that power.

Without being ſo Curious, we may content our ſelves with that Senſe of the word, which our Marginal Reading ſuggeſts, and by *power* underſtand the *Privilege* of becoming the Sons of God, and even thus it affords us theſe two Conſiderations. *The Excellence and Greatneſs of the Benefit*, and Then the *Free Beſtowing it upon us.*

1. *The Excellence and Greatneſs of the Benefit* is abundantly declared in the very Title it ſelf, inſomuch that St. *John* thought he had reaſon to cry out with ſome Aſtoniſhment, when he reflected upon the Excellence of

of the Benefit, and the unparallel'd Greatneſs of the Condeſcenſion. * *Behold* (ſays he) *what manner of love the Father hath beſtowed on us, that we ſhould be called the Sons of God!* And reaſon good he had moſt certainly. For, What could expreſs, What can confer greater Happineſs? By This we are allowed to promiſe our ſelves all that Protection and Tender Care, all that Compaſſion and kind Concern, all that Indulgence and favourable Allowance for our failings, all that ready Relief in our neceſſities, all that ample Proviſion for our proſperity and well being, which Nature inſpires affectionate Fathers with, and gives dutiful Children a right to expect. How much this is I pretend not to deſcribe, for Words cannot do it. I refer my ſelf to Parents, for Parents only know, and what they know in this reſpect, is much eaſier felt than expreſt. But give me leave to ſay, that, when the beſt good-natured man hath ſummoned all the ſofteſt Reſentments together, that either the Bowels of a Father, or the moſt winning Endearments of a Child, can engage him to. This and much more

* 1 John III. 1.

more is derived down upon every Christian, by being the *Son of God. Of God*; whose Love is infinite and incomprehensible, grounded upon better, and more substantial Motives; Who, as he is not moved by the same springs of Passion with mortal Men, so he is not subject to their Inconstancies, and Picques, and unaccountable Disgusts. His Affection is steady and permanent; He always loves when we deserve it, and always pities, and is easy to be reconciled, when we do not. *Of God*, whose Power is as immense as his Love; So that This does not spend it self in sad Complaints, and melancholy Reflections, and unprofitable Wishes, as that of Earthly Parents often does, who see with aking and with bleeding hearts their Children's wants, and even die under those Miseries they cannot help: But This Father understands all our occasions, can supply all our necessities, can redress all our wrongs, remove all our misfortunes, and is not more willing, than he is able to assist us. Of God I say, whose Provision is not like what we are so immoderately sollicitous to procure for our Children

Children here upon Earth; The Prey of uſurping Greatneſs, or treacherous Falſhood, or crafty Forgery; the Booty of Invaſion, and Violence, and Theft; the Sport of Fire, and Water, and Winds, and every Element; Nay even the Food of Ruſt, and Moths, Or, if ſpared by all theſe, yet at the beſt ſuch as muſt waſt, and periſh in the uſing; But an Inheritance, large and Eternal as the Bounteous Giver, above the reach of Caſualties, and outlaſting even Time it ſelf. *Of God* laſtly, the King of Kings and Lord of all Lords, One who exalts us to a Dignity infinitely above what any Earthly Prince or Potentate can pretend to; The place of Honour in the Court of Heaven, and, without the melancholy Ceremonies of Death and Succeſſion, gives to each Son a Crown; A Crown of Life, a Crown of Glory, a Crown of Righteouſneſs, incorruptible, and that fadeth not away for ever. Theſe are but faint and feeble Repreſentations of the Honours and Happineſſes, that accrue to us by being thus related; But Who can hear even Theſe, without breaking out again into St. *John's* rapturous Reflection,

Behold

Behold, what manner of Love the Father hath beſtowed on us, that we ſhould be called the Sons of God!

2. But I obſerved, (*Secondly*,) that This manner of the Evangeliſt's expreſſing himſelf, as it ſpoke the Greatneſs, ſo did it alſo imply *the Freedom of the Gift*. The very Nature of a Privilege ſeems to carry ſomething of Indulgence and Grace in it; Something which, though granted upon good Conſiderations, yet could not in ſtrict right have been challenged. And This is the Caſe of Chriſtians; They were in no Condition of meriting this mighty Favour. Much otherwiſe indeed; Their Circumſtances were poor, and low, and miſerable. For what can poſſibly be more ſo, than Man corrupted by Sin? A moſt loſt, moſt polluted Object, the Servant, the Slave, the Child of the Devil; bewildred in Darkneſs and Ignorance, captivated and bound up in Chains of Sin and Folly; and paſt the extent of any natural Powers to enlighten, or to releaſe him. Omnipotence only could do it, nay even Omnipotence without Love had not done it to Perfection. But by a happy

by Conjunction of these Two, we are set free; Set free the noblest way, not so much as the *Spirit of bondage* and *fear* remaining, but are so made the Servants, as at the same time to attain the *glorious Liberty of the Sons*, of God. Not such by Nature, 'tis true; but adopted for the sake of Him who is so by Nature, and who in wonderful Condescension is not ashamed to call us Brethren.

My Former Particular took notice, that Some things are required of Us, in order to make good this Adoption. But These are appointed only as Instruments, as Signs, and Seals, and do not so much pass, as record and testify, the Act, and insure the Benefit of it to us. As the Writing of Indenture does not convey an Estate, for the Person's Sealing and Delivering does that, but is only called a Deed, because it testifies the Deed of the Party, and, as such Testimony, secures the Possession to him for whose use it was done: So The Sacraments of the Gospel, when received with Faith and all necessary Qualifications, are only the Means, and Methods of deriving this Sonship upon us. Seals and Evi-

dence

dences of what God does there. But ſtill it is not the Sacrament, but God in and by the Sacrament, that makes us Children. There is no ſuch Merit in the Virtues and Diſpoſitions of the Mind that partakes of them; No ſuch inherent Power in the Matter or the Form, the Words or the Elements, as can by any Efficacy of their own work this mighty Change: All is the Act, the free Gift, the peculiar Bleſſing of the moſt High, exalting theſe things into Effects Myſterious, and above their natural faculties. And, as the Water, though of all Elements moſt fruitful, had produced nothing in the firſt Creation, if the Spirit of God had not brooded upon it; ſo in the Second Birth it is that Spirit alone that *ſanctifies water to the waſhing away of Sin*, and enables it to bring forth a Child of God. But though ſuch Similitudes as theſe are of great uſe, to give us ſome Apprehenſion of things that fall not directly under Senſes, yet we are not to ſuppoſe this ſhould hold in every Circumſtance. For between This, and Common Births there is a wide difference, as St. *John* plainly declares, and it is the deſign of my

Third Particular to obſerve, which takes notice

III. Of The Manner how this Sonſhip is conferred; from thoſe Words, of my Text, *Who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the fleſh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* The meaning whereof ſeems in ſhort to be thus much. That we are not conceive of This, as of Uſual and Natural Births, as if it were produced out of Material Principles, or promoted by Senſual Inclinations; but All here is Spiritual and Sublime; *It is God that beget us of his own will*, and this is done by *the word of truth*, as St. *James* obſerves, (*Ch.* I. *v.* 18.) Or if you pleaſe to take theſe Expreſſions, as Some have done, in a Metaphorical Senſe, ſo they import, that no Faculties of our own, no Deſires of Senſe, no Principles of Reaſon and Morality can riſe ſo high, there muſt be Divine Grace, or there can be no Child of God. The thing is true in both Interpretations, and all the Enlargement I ſhall make upon it, is only to ſet before you the Reaſonableneſs of this being repreſented to us under the notion of Regeneration or a Second Birth; and then to deſcribe

ſcribe the Manner of it's being brought about, as the Scripture hath inſtructed us in it.

By Natural Birth and Generation it is plain, we come to have a Life, which we had not before. We have a Principle of Motion imparted to us, and from dead ſenſeleſs Matter are enabled to perform all the Functions that are proper to Humane Nature; Another Creature is produced, of the ſame kind with thoſe from whence it ſprung, and grows up by degrees to the ſame uſe of Senſe, the ſame Reaſon, the ſame Underſtanding, the ſame Deſires of what is not convenient, and the ſame Averſions and Fears of what is hurtful and deſtructive to it. And in all theſe Circumſtances men are very properly ſaid to be *born again*, upon their Converſion to, and believing in, Chriſt. The Condition they were in before, is a State of utter Inactivity, and for this reaſon we find them ſtyled * *dead in treſpaſſes and ſins*, and ſaid to be *quickned* by the Grace and Spirit of God. They were impriſoned and confined, and the utmoſt Efforts they were capable of making, are but like the faint Struggles of an Embryo

* Epheſ. II. 1.

in the Womb. But this coming to the Birth gives them liberty to exert themſelves, and lets them into a new and different Scene of Action. It produces a *New Creature*, as the Scripture terms it, that is; Such a Newneſs as a Soul is capable of; New Notions and Diſpoſitions, and, conſequent to theſe, a New Converſation proceeding from them. So that every ſuch Perſon is quite another Man from what he was before. And this Alteration conforms us to the Image of him that begot us; Every thing is pure and Godlike, and expreſſes a Reſemblance to his Eſſential Holineſs. It gives a freſh turn to our Thoughts and Affections, ſo that we are not acted as before, by the ſame carnal Apprehenſions, nor the ſame ſenſual Inclinations. It imprints a new Character upon our Underſtandings, and gives us a true Senſe of Good and Evil, and it puts a quite different Bent upon our Will; ſuch as diſpoſes us to love what is truly Good, and Spiritual, and Heavenly, and to deſpiſe and deteſt what is Worldly, and Wicked. This is that Likeneſs of *Species*, which juſtifies the Metaphor; The greateſt that can poſſibly happen to a Soul,

Soul, the greateſt that a Moral Principle is capable of; and ſo great, as to render it very ſignificant and proper to ſay of every ſuch Perſon, that he is *born again.*

But we know, that, by being born, men become part of a Family, and have a Right to a Child's Share in the Diviſion of the Eſtate. And This is another good Reaſon, for mens being ſaid to be *born of God*; becauſe by that means they are let into New Relations, and acquire New Titles. Thus St. *Paul* tells Chriſtians, *that* * *they receive the Spirit of Adoption*, and by it have a right to *call God Father*, that they are *Sons*, and *not only Sons, but heirs, heirs of God, and coheirs with Chriſt.* That they are from thenceforth allied to the whole *Family, that is named of God both in Heaven and Earth*; And, from Aliens, and Strangers, and Enemies, come, not only to be admitted into a ſtrict Alliance with, but to obtain the moſt honourable, and moſt advantagious Poſt in, the Houſhold. And ſince theſe Prerogatives among Men are the Effect of Birth and Blood, the ſame conferred with regard to our Spiritual Kindred, and Divine

* Gal. IV.

Inheritance, is very fitly represented by being *born of God*. For, as Foreigners, though the dearest Friends, are not legally qualified for them in Settlements of this World, except in default of Issue, and where the Race is extinct; So here, none who is not of the Family can inherit, and they who are most worthy of it, are first made capable of it, by becoming Children. And for this reason it is, that this Title is so often made use of, and so highly extolled in Scripture; because, whatever Privileges the Rest may imply, yet None can minister that Comfort and Confidence, None can assure our Inheritance, or give us A Pretence to the Glory and Kingdom of Heaven, but this of *Sons* only.

Now for the Manner of working this Change in us, (which was the Other Consideration propounded under this Head) That also carries so great a Similitude to a natural Birth, that no Figure in the World could give us a clearer Idea of the thing. The Act of Generation and Birth gives Being once for all, and, at the instant of coming into the World, the Child, the Heir

is

is born, to all the Rights of his Quality and Family. So likewiſe in the Sacrament of Baptiſm, we have the Spirit of God conferred upon us, which, as it is a Spirit of Grace, is a Principle of new Life to us; and, as it is a Spirit of Adoption, it inſtates us in all the Privileges that can belong to Children of ſuch a Father. And for this reaſon our Church, immediately after the Covenant is ſtruck, gives thanks to Almighty God, and acknowledges him *a moſt merciful Father, for that it hath pleaſed him to regenerate the* Perſons then newly baptized *with his holy Spirit, to receive them for his own Children by Adoption, and to incorporate them into his holy Church:* As alſo ſhe moſt wiſely and truly declares, at the beginning of her excellent Catechiſm, that in Baptiſm *we are made Members of Chriſt, Children of God, and Inheritors of the Kingdom of Heaven.* But a Member muſt be cut off, if it be mortified; Children may provoke their Parents to put them by their Birth-right; and an Heir under Age, is ſuch in Reverſion, and Hope only. The Natural Parent gives a Principle of Life, but it is ſuch a one as will

ſoon periſh and go out again, if due care be not taken to preſerve it. And ſo it is here: The Spirit of God quickens us upon his firſt Infuſions, but we are to cheriſh the kindly warmth. God is our Father in the ſuſtaining and nouriſhing, as well as in the Enlivening part. He knows, the Life that is in us, is ſubject to perpetual decays, and therefore the ſame natural Affection, that occaſioned our being born His, does likewiſe engage and aſſure us of all neceſſary Supplies to continue His; provided we uſe what he gives, and employ that Principle of Spiritual Self-preſervation. Grace therefore, though it be given at firſt, yet is not given all at firſt. There is that proportion given, which makes us Children, but we are commanded * *to feed upon the ſincere milk of the word*, directed to † *grow in grace*, and to pray for the increaſe of Grace, that *we may come to the fullneſs of the Stature of perfect men in Chriſt Jeſus*. A Man may languiſh under long Indiſpoſitions, and be taken with very violent and acute Diſeaſes, and yet recover again. And ſo he may commit ſome very foul and grievous Sins, or accuſtom himſelf to the

* 1 Pet. II. 2.

† 2 Pet. III. 18.

Epheſ. IV. 13.

the habits of Others that are leſs, without ceaſing to live ſpiritually. Theſe indeed dim the Candle of the Lord, and eclipſe the Brightneſs of its ſhine, but they do not put it abſolutely out. And therefore God, who knows our waſtings and our failings, hath promiſed his Grace to us, upon the uſe of proper means. Such as Repentance, and Conſideration, the Hearing his Word, and receiving the Sacrament of his Death. Theſe are Spiritual Food and Suſtenance; Theſe are our Remedies and Reſtoratives, ordained to make thoſe that are ſick well, and thoſe that are well, better and ſtronger ſtill. So that there is a mighty difference between Regeneration and Renovation. We can be born but once, becauſe we can live but once; and therefore Baptiſm, which gives Life, cannot be repeated. But we can recover often, and grow and be nouriſhed often, becauſe we may ſink and droop often, and therefore the Lord's Supper, and other Holy Ordinances, ſhould be frequented often, becauſe they are our Medicines, and our Meats, and our Refreſhments; And accordingly you ſee one of our

Collects

* *Collect for* Christmas Day.

Collects * begs of God, *that we being regenerate, and made his Children by Adoption and Grace, may daily be renewed by his holy Spirit.* So mighty an Affinity is there between our Natural and Spiritual Condition; So truly we are ſaid to be *born of God*, not only from the New Production and New Principle, and New Relations that attend this Life, but alſo from the Manner of giving it, and of ſuſtaining it, after it is once given.

I have only time for one word upon my Fourth and laſt Head, the Extent of this Benefit, in thoſe words, *As many as received him, to them gave he power to become the Sons of God.* And what a Comfortable Reflection is this! That there is no diſtinction of Birth, or Quality, of Sex, Age, or Circumſtances in the World! That They who cannot get Admittance ſo much as into the Preſence or Palace of Earthly Princes, ſhould be capable of Thrones and Crowns with the Great Lord of Heaven and Earth! That there is no reſpect of Perſons here! Nothing but Faith and Virtue makes the difference. The Privileges are ſuſpended upon

Terms

Terms put into our own Power, and never denied, never taken away, except upon ſome perſonal and voluntary Default. But of This I ſhall have occaſion to ſpeak at large in my next Diſcourſe.

SER-

SERMON IX.

THE NATURE Of the Christian's CALLING and ELECTION.

Stated from the Parable of the Marriage Feast.

St. Matth. XXII. 14.

For Many are called, but Few are chosen.

THese Words are the Moral, as it were, of the Fable, the Application of that Similitude, which went before. For our Saviour, who had to deal with a most perverse Generation of Men, found great occasion to exercise his Divine Wisdom, in

in chuſing, not only the moſt inſtructive, but the ſofteſt and moſt inoffenſive, methods of Diſcourſe. Upon Theſe, as well as ſome Other accounts, he is very reaſonably preſumed to have delivered himſelf ſo often in Parables. But, becauſe they were figurative and ſomewhat dark, therefore he frequently cloſes them with ſome very Significant Sentence, which does not only reſult from, but helps to explain the Compariſon; and is at once the Conſequence and the Key of what had gone before. Of this nature is my Text, and what Relation it bears to the Parable, from the beginning of the Chapter to this Verſe, I ſhall ſhew you as plainly, and as briefly as I can.

By the *Kingdom of Heaven* here, and in many other places, is meant the Diſpenſation of the Goſpel. So called, becauſe the Doctrine of it both deſcended from Thence to Us, and is deſigned to bring us Thither; As alſo, becauſe This is that peculiar Province, which God hath choſen to exert his glorious Attributes in; his Juſtice, and Wiſdom, and Goodneſs, and Power, and Truth; All which are moſt illuſtriouſly ſeen in the Preſent State of Affairs,

Affairs, which is usually called the *Kingdom of Grace* here; and shall be manifested to all the World in their utmost Perfection, in the *Kingdom of Glory* hereafter.

Now, of the several Steps taken to bring men into this Kingdom, not Any one seemed more astonishing and unaccountable to the World, than That, by which the *Jews*, God's ancient and peculiar People, were rejected, and postponed; and Preference given to the Idolatrous Gentiles, who knew not the true God, nor had hitherto been acknowledged of him. And therefore This surprising difficulty is what our Saviour, by many of his Actions and Miracles, hints would be done; and, by most of his Parables, did not only foretell, but declare how, and why it was done: Of those Declarations there is not Any more full and clear, than this concluded by my Text. Which presents us with the whole Process and Mystery of the Gospel in little; And, from its first being planted among men, carries our Eyes to a vast and distant Prospect, even the final Judgment, and Consummation of all things.

For

For in that general Design of the Paſſage All I think are agreed; however they diſſent from each other, as to particular and leſs material Circumſtances. In which differences I ſhall not at all concern my ſelf at preſent, but give you a ſhort Draught of the Whole, according to what I apprehend to be the moſt natural and reaſonable Explanation of it.

By the *King* * here, we are to underſtand God the Father, and the *Marriage he made for his Son*, is the Propagation of the Goſpel, and the Salvation of Mankind. This was begun, when he firſt took upon him humane Nature, and joyned his Divinity to our Fleſh; And, continued ſince, in all the Acts of Love and Condeſcenſion, and kind Approaches to his Spouſe the Church, till that joyful Supper of the Lamb, when ſhe ſhall be admitted into the fullneſs of her Lord's Joy; and all her true Members, who are now in the Quality of Gueſts only, be from thenceforth inſeparably united to him. * Verſ. 1.

To this Marriage † ſome were *bidden* before-hand, that is, The *Jews* by the Shadows of a Typical Law, by the Revelations and Writings of the Prophets † Verſ. 3.

phets, had notice of a Redemption and Meſſiah to appear. And to Theſe, when the time of the Wedding was come (*i. e.*) when God was manifeſted in the Fleſh, the King *ſent forth his Servants*, *John* Baptiſt, the Diſciples, and our Bleſſed Saviour himſelf, who by his preaching took this Office of inviting the Company upon him; But neither had the former Bidding prepared, nor could the preſent Invitation pre-
* Verſ. 4. vail upon, them to come. * After this, Others are ſent to let them know, that *all things were now ready*, the Proviſion brought in, and nothing but Gueſts wanting. That is, The Apoſtles, after our Saviour's Death, made the *Jews* freſh and more preſſing tenders of Salvation; They acquainted them that *the Oxen and Fatlings were killed*, that is, the Son of God was crucified, the true Paſchal Lamb was ſlain, and the Feaſt waited for them; So that now the Maſter of the Entertainment had done His part, and only waited for Their Acceptance, and Appearance. But neither was This Meſſage any more ſucceſsful than the former. Some
† Verſ. 5. † thought Scorn of the Proffer, as not worth their hearkening to; Some again

again, had engaged themselves in Affairs of another kind, and would not permit their Worldly business to give way, or allow them leisure for this Spiritual Entertainment: And a Third sort, * yet worse than both these, received those gracious Messages with Rage and Spight, flew upon the Servants that brought them, and with a Malice as unreasonable, as it was implacable, abused, and tormented, and murdered them. This was an Indignity so great, an Obstinacy so affected and invincible, that the King was provoked beyond all † Patience, and resolved to take Vengeance on these disobedient and bloody men; (*i.e.*) God gave up the *Jews* to utter Excision for their Perverseness, and Persecutions; He issued out his Commission to the *Romans*, and by Them did not only slay those murderous Wretches, but delivered up their City and Commonwealth to irretrievable Destruction. But, after he had done himself and his Honour Justice upon these base, these bold Contemners of his Majesty, and his Mercy; it was not fit, that all his bountiful Preparations should be defeated and lost; And therefore ‖ the

* Verf. 6.

† Verf. 7.

‖ Verf. 8, 9.

Servants are diſmiſt once more, with Orders to pick up all the Stragglers, and Poor, for ſuch in effect were the vagabond Gentiles. Theſe received eagerly, what the Former refuſed with diſdain,

* Verſ. 10. and * a vaſt promiſcuous number came in, ſo as to fill the Table, and anſwer the largeneſs of the Proviſion.

Thus far the Purport of ſeveral other Parables reaches; but This carries the Matter on yet farther: And ſhews, that the bare Coming in, and accepting the Invitation is not ſufficient, unleſs the Dignity of the Perſon, and of the Feaſt be conſulted, and Men come, as ſo ſolemn an Entertainment requires.

† Verſ. 11, 12. And therefore † by the *King*'s coming *in to take an account of the Gueſts*, and puniſhing the Man that wanted a Wedding Garment, is repreſented, that ſtrict and particular, Examination, which ſhall paſs upon every Chriſtian at the laſt Day: That Then, the profeſſing the ſame Faith, being Members of the ſame viſible Church, receiving the ſame Sacraments, and enjoying the ſame Privileges, will profit Men nothing, if their Souls in the mean while be either foul or naked, ſtained with Evil Works, or not adorned with good

good ones; That, however Some may pass upon their Brethren, and not be distinguisht in a Crowd of Believers; yet there will come a time of stricter search, and they must be brought before a more discerning Eye; One that will [separate, not only between Infidels and Believers, those that *come*, and those that *refuse*; but, even of them that do come, between the Hypocrites and real Good Men. And, though but One such be mentioned here, yet that One is the common Representative of all disorderly and careless, of all dissembling and formal Livers, the Type of Their Wickedness, and of Their Doom. Upon the whole of which Matter, the Refusals of them who would not come, and the Neglect and Miscarriage of Him that did come, but came not duly qualified, our Blessed Lord passes this Reflection in the words now read, that *Many are called but few are chosen.*

So that any Man, who considers at all the Circumstances of this Case, may very easily resolve himself, who in this Parable are the *Called*, and who the *Chosen* of God. All, to whom his Servants

are ſent, whether they receive his Invitations or no; And All, who do receive them, though the gracious End of thoſe Meſſages be not fully attained; All, that are bidden and do not come, and all that come, and are thruſt out again for not coming as they ought; Theſe are the *Called*, and theſe are *Many*. But thoſe that thankfully embrace the good Proffers of Salvation, and come when they are called; that come with Reverence and Decency; clothed with the Wedding Garment, the white Robe of Righteouſneſs and Innocence; that is, who take care to * *walk worthy of the vocation, wherewith they are called* (as St. *Paul* expreſſes it) Theſe, and Theſe only are *the Choſen*; and They, it ſeems, are but *Few*; In Compariſon, God knows, but very Few.

* Epheſ. IV. 1.

Concerning this Notion then, and Who are to be ranked under each of theſe Diviſions, the Controverſy is not very conſiderable. But what ſhould be the Cauſe of ſuch Diſparity in their numbers, mighty Doubts and Diſputes have riſen. Whence it is, that ſo many of the *Called*, are not yet of the *Choſen*; whether from Him who calls, but

but never intends to chuſe all that he calls; or, whether from Them who are Called, but are not fit, or do not qualify themſelves, for being Choſen. Which is as much as to ſay, whether the Damnation of Mens Souls ought to lie at God's, or their own, Door; whether His Election be Abſolute, and Arbitrary, and Unconditional, ſo that Some ſhall not be *choſen*, though they would never ſo fain; Or whether it proceed upon Terms of Equity, and ſuch Juſtice, as we can judge of; ſo that no Man is rejected without his own Fault; and even thoſe who are not *choſen*, might have been, if they had not been wanting to themſelves. This is an Enquiry of great Conſequence. And, to Them who are unprepoſſeſt, and will ſubmit to conſider the thing fairly, this Parable, I take it, is capable of giving great Satisfaction. For it ſhews us plainly what the King did, and what his Subjects did not do; Why many of thoſe who were *called* did not come at all; and Why of thoſe that did come, all were not *choſen*; that is, not approved, and admitted to partake of the Feaſt. The deſign of which is to hint at the Rea-

ſons of the Goſpel's being unſucceſsful in any reſpect, Either to Them that are without, or to Them that are within, and under its Diſpenſation; And what hinders, that Some, to whom it is preached, do not believe; and that ſome Believers are yet not ſaved by that Belief. For the Former ſort are repreſented by the *Jews*, and the Latter by the *perſon without a wedding garment:* And, to ſatisfy this Argument, I ſhall handle each of the Caſes diſtinctly, and conſider what Circumſtances the Parable takes notice of in Either of them; both Thoſe, which relate to the Perſon *calling* and *chooſing*, and thoſe, which concern the Perſons *called*, but not *choſen*.

Firſt, We are to examine the Caſe of the *Jews*, ſet down from the *Second* to the *Eighth* Verſe; and to learn thence, if we can, why thoſe who were *called* did not *come*, or (which is the ſame thing in other words) wherefore Some, to whom the Goſpel is preached, do not accept and believe it. And, in order to the reſolving this Queſtion, we will look into the Behaviour of Each Party; Of the King *firſt* that made, and *then* of the Subjects that refuſed, the Invitation. On

On the King's Part Two things are considerable, The Preparations he made; And the Desire he expresst that men should partake of them.

The Former of these is described in the Parable, by *making a Marriage for his Son, killing his Oxen and Fatlings*, and taking care, that *his dinner* and *all things should be ready*; For These are properly the Preparing part there. And they seem to answer in the Application to God's sending his Son in our Flesh; The Design and the Accomplishment of that Mystery, in suffering him to be born and to die for us, and all the necessary Provision made for present Conversion and future Happiness. His Desire that men should partake of these Benefits manifests it self, in bidding them to the Wedding, that is, in all sorts of Warnings and Instructions given Men before-hand; by the Light of Nature; by particular Revelations afforded to the Forefathers of these *Jews*; by the Precepts and Promises of the Law; by the clearer Predictions of the Prophets; by the Types and Figures of the Levitical Dispensation; and by all the Methods taken to instruct and prepare the World at a

distance for reaping the Advantages of this Redemption. And again, when the Fullness of time was come, by sending forth his Servants upon a second Message to repeat this Call, at the Appearance of the Son of God in Flesh; And farther yet, when the Espousals were now compleated, when the Spiritual and Divine Feast was set out, and the Table spread, by slaying that Lamb, which is the Food of Souls, dispatching his Messengers yet again and again; putting them in mind afresh, pressing, importuning, conjuring them to accept of his Bounty; and at length resenting their unworthy and unkind Refusals so heinously; and inflicting so severe a Punishment upon their Obstinacy and Ingratitude: And, last of all, when these *Jews* had shewed themselves proof, against so many gracious Means used to reduce them, by granting a fresh Commission for making the same Offers to the Gentile World, that so his Designs of Kindness might not be utterly defeated, but These, by their Complyance, might gain an equal Title, to the Blessings which the Former had forfeited and justly lost, through

their

their inflexible Stubbornness and Contempt.

From all these Circumstances fairly put together, I do not see how we can, with any good Reason, avoid the submitting our Assent to these following Conclusions.

First, That *The Redemption of the World by the Incarnation and Death of Christ, was an Act of God's free Mercy, and marvellous Grace.* This King did not marry his Son with a design to add to his Happiness or his Honour. Those were perfect before. But merely to exalt and ennoble the Spouse he took. Nor had She any Charms to attract his Love, any Beauty or Comeliness to feast his Sight, but was in her self deformed, and scandalous, and poor. For it was wretched Humane Nature that he married himself to; He laid aside for a while the Rays of his Glory, to be clothed with the Rags of Flesh; and a Church * which (though now indeed *without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing*, yet) was, when He first vouchsafed to pity, and to love her, of a quite different Form and Hue. For all her present Purity and Loveliness is owing to her being cleansed

* Ephes. V. 27. Rev. I. 7.

cleanſed and waſhed from her Sins in her Lord's blood. No Intereſt, no Honour was to be expected from a Match ſo mean, ſo much below this Prince; No End to be ſerved by it; No Argument to move it, but infinite Kindneſs and Compaſſion, that ſaw the Miſeries of wretched Humanity, and tenderly yearned over them; And, when no other relief could be had, condeſcended to take Our Miſeries, and make them his own; that ſo His Glory and Happineſs might become Ours.

Secondly, It follows from hence, *That the Mercy figured here by this Marriage was intended for the Benefit of Mankind.* And This deſerves to be taken notice of, becauſe it differs herein from all other ſuch Solemnities, as the Parable ſhadows it to us under. For, whereas Perſons of the Firſt Quality and greateſt Worth are uſually the only ones, that Princes admit to bear a part in their Rejoycings and Entertainments; Here the meaner and more unworthy ſort have the Honour of the Day. The Angels are vaſtly Superiour to Us, in the Dignity and Excellence of their Nature; *yet Chriſt*

(as

(as the Apostle observes) *took* * *not on him the Nature of Angels, but he took the seed of Abraham.* Many of Them too were fallen as deep as We, yet to Us he extended Compassion, and to Them he did not. And therefore, of many Considerations, that recommend this Call to Grace and Salvation, this Condescension is not the least, that, when Both were miserable, and Both undeserving, Those of a Higher Rank were past by, and left out; and They of an Inferiour Condition were pitied and exalted; thought fit to have the Son of God joyned to Their Substance, admitted to sit with him at his Table in his Kingdom; nay to be the very Bride and Beloved of the Lamb himself.

* Heb. II. 16.

Thirdly, We may likewise gather from hence, *That the Design of this Benefit was universal.* For the Parable plainly describes an Invitation sent to all manner of People. Not to all at once, it is true, but first to the *Jews*, and afterwards, upon Their refusal, to the Gentiles. So that, although some were preferred in point of Time and Order, yet both sorts had their turn, and none were utterly excluded.

The

The People and City of God had reason to expect the first Proffers, but the Servants that were sent out, and begun with these, did not stop there; For the *Ninth* Verse commands *them out again to the highways, and hedges*; and *to bid to the marriage* all, as *many as ever they should find*. This agrees exactly with those large and comprehensive Terms, in which the Apostle's Commission ran, when Christ after his Resurrection charged them, * *to disciple and baptize all nations*, to *Go out into all the world and preach the Gospel to every Creature*. And I know not what Other Demonstration we would have, of God's designing, that All should partake of this Spiritual Feast, than his taking such Care, that All should have due notice of it; and pressing them over and over, with repeated Messages to that purpose; St. *Paul*, in his first Epistle to *Timothy*, seems to argue, that † *God would have all men to be saved* from his using means to bring *them to the knowledge of the truth*. And, with regard to the Sacrifice of Expiation, He tells the *Hebrews* ‖ that Jesus was *made a little lower than the Angels, that He by the Grace*

* Matth. XXVIII. 19. Mark XVI. 16.

† Tim. II. 4.

‖ Heb. II. 9.

Grace of God ſhould taſt death for every man. The Deſign is not leſs univerſal becauſe the Effect is not ſo; For St. *Peter* * upbraids the men, who brought in damnable Hereſies, with *denying the Lord that bought them, and ſo bringing upon themſelves deſtruction.* And the Apoſtle to the *Romans* enlarges moſt admirably, to ſhew the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of Providence, in converting the Obſtinacy of the *Jews* into an occaſion of bringing in the fullneſs of the Gentiles; that ſo the Converſion of the Gentiles might be alſo an occaſion of ſoftening the *Jews*, by working them up to a holy Emulation of that Happineſs and Obedience, which thoſe deſpiſed Nations had ſo ſurpriſingly outſtripped them in. Some Perſons indeed there are, who deny the force of this Reaſon; and pretend, that God never intended, that thoſe who ſtood out, ſhould ever have come in; that he hardned their hearts, and made it impoſſible for them to hearken to, or comply with his Calls. But I add, notwithſtanding.

* 2 Pet. II. 1.

Fourthly, That *God was very ſerious in theſe Invitations, and that the Parable*

rable gives us ground ſufficient to believe ſo. It is true, Among Men many things are done merely out of Ceremony and Form; Many proffers made in hopes of being refuſed; Many Civilities ſhewn, where nothing leſs is intended; And what the World calls Complaiſance and good Breeding, is frequently not ſo much the Language, as the Diſguiſe, of the mind: And hard it is to know, whether it proceed from real Friendſhip, or be the Effect of Formality, or Flattery, or Diſſimulation, or Fear. But This cannot poſſibly be the Caſe here. For to ſuppoſe Almighty God guilty of ſuch mean Arts, is to think moſt unworthily, and moſt inconſiſtently of him. With Him is no Deceivableneſs, no Deceit: A thing ſo vile and confeſſedly baſe, that They who practice it moſt, are always aſhamed to own it; and therefore uſe their utmoſt induſtry to mask it well. Though Few in compariſon are ſincere, yet every Man is ambitious, and labours to be thought ſincere. And what the very Worſt of ſinful Mortals deteſts, is ſure a Character not to be aſcribed to the Beſt and Holieſt Being.

Again,

Again, As the Nature of God is not capable of any indirect or double Dealing, or false and flattering Pretences, so is there no imaginable Reason, from without, that should incline him to make use of them. He cannot contract an Obligation from his own Creatures, nor can he stand in Awe of their Displeasure. What then should move him to profess Kindness, where none is due? What, where he cannot suffer by with-holding it? What indeed, but his own Infinite and Essential Goodness? Can the Great God of Heaven and Earth gain any advantage by insinuating himself into the Affections, and courting the good Opinion, of poor Worms, who can never profit him by the best of their polluted and imperfect Services? He stands not in need of any Returns our Gratitude can make; Nor is his Happiness defective without them. And Common Sense tells us, that, were Our State independent upon the Favour or Friendship of one another, there would not be such a thing, as a Flatterer or Dissembler in the World. If then this King in the Parable did not design his Invitations should be accepted, why did

did he ever make them at all? But at leaſt, when men refuſed them, why did he not take them at their word? A Complement, that is merely ſuch, is eaſily dropp'd: And when men are well enough pleaſed to be deny'd, they are uſually content to ſpare the trouble of preſſing. But is This at all agreeable to the Methods uſed here for bringing in Gueſts to the Marriage? If the Firſt Bidding would bear ſo vile an Interpretation, yet ſure the Importunities of a Second and Third Call will by no means endure it. And yet leaſt of all will that Indignation for being ſo unworthily rejected; The New Commiſſions iſſued out to his Servants; The mighty Care of picking up other Gueſts; And the ſevere Revenge upon Thoſe, who received his gracious Offers with Diſdain. In all appearance, the doing what God all along intended men ſhould do, nay, what he made it neceſſary for them to do, ought not to have bred ſo irreconcilable a Quarrel.

We acknowledge indeed, that the Counſels of Almighty God are a vaſt and dark Depth; and think, it very unbe-

unbecoming poor feeble Mortals, too busily to intrude into, or peremptorily to pronounce concerning, them. But there are some plain Principles so obvious, that all contending Parties cannot but agree in them. That the *Judge of all the Earth* cannot but *do right*, is a Truth universally confess'd. And, though Justice in God may proceed upon Measures not understood by Us, and be perfect above what we are able to comprehend; yet since Just and Unjust, Good and Evil are not arbitrary and unalterable things, we have no reason to suppose, that Justice and Goodness in God are contrary to what we esteem Just and Good among Men. And therefore Men may be excused, if they think, that all the Caution and Jealousy due to the Honour of God's Justice and Goodness have not been observed, by Some, who, out of honest Zeal perhaps, have set up a secret Will in the Divine Decrees, which seems plainly repugnant to the Known Will of his Precepts, and Revelations. For if God will, that Any should hear, and receive, and obey his Gospel; and enjoyns this upon pain of Damnation;

and hath in most solemn manner declared this to be his Will; and yet at the same time hath another Will to us unknown, which controuls and overrules all this; and will not suffer such to receive and obey his Word, though they would never so fain; and then punishes and damns them eternally for not doing so. Let Them who maintain this Doctrine tell us, how we shall deliver it from such Reflections upon the Honour, the Justice, the Goodness, the Truth, and (if I may be allowed so to speak) the Sincerity and Common Honesty of the Divine Nature, as Reverence to so Great a Majesty will not suffer me to name. In Matters of so high a Nature, great Allowances may be made for unaffected Mistakes, and Difference in Opinion. But it can be no just matter of blame, to dissent from those Doctrines, the Consequences of which even They that advance them profess to abhor, and yet have not shewn us how they can be avoided. For, so far as yet appears, if This be the case, *our Preaching is vain, and your Faith is also vain.* And therefore we have great Reason to conclude, that God does

not

not obstruct mens honest Endeavours in the use of Outward Means, but leaves them in their full Power; and that his Decrees are such, as consist very well with the Temper of his Covenants, his Exhortations, his Promises, his Threatnings, his vehement and affectionate Expostulations, his laying the Sinner's Ruine at his own door, so frequently, and so manifestly recorded in Scripture. Were it not thus, what wretched Uncertainties are Christians abandoned to, what terrible Anxieties and Discouragements must they labour under in their greatest Concern? So great, that the best good Man could never tell, what he hath to trust to. And I know not, whether it might not truly be affirmed, that, upon these Terms, They, to whom Revelation and the Light of the Gospel have come, are of *all men most* miserable.

Some Other Conclusions there are very proper upon this occasion, but these I must be satisfied with referring to my next Discourse.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON X.

THE NATURE Of the Christian's CALLING and ELECTION.

Stated from the Parable of the Marriage Feast.

St. Matth. XXII. 14.

For Many are called, but Few are chosen.

MY Design in the Choice of these Words was to treat of that Calling and Election, whereby Men are at last brought to the obtaining that Salvation, which is purchased for them by Christ, and tendred to them in his Gospel. And in

in this Undertaking I have made ſome Progreſs already, by a former Diſcourſe.

1. By explaining the Parable of which my Text is the Concluſion, and ſhewing, who are the *Called*, and who the *Choſen* of God. That in the former Claſs are to be reckoned All, to whom the Invitations of this King, that is, the Word of God hath come; Whether they *came to the marriage*, upon ſuch Invitations or not; Whether they receive or reject Chriſt preached to them. And All who came, whether with or without the Wedding Garment; who do receive and profeſs the Truth, though they do not attain to all the Advantages of a true Faith, and Theſe are *Many*. But by the *Choſen* Thoſe only are to be underſtood, that thankfully and dutifully embrace the Proffers of Salvation; and, by conforming their Lives to the Precepts of Chriſtianity in Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs, are admitted as worthy Partakers of this Divine Feaſt. And Theſe it ſeems, in compariſon of the Numbers ſo *Called* as I have ſaid, are but *Few*.

But now, in regard that in order to our right Understanding, and receiving due Encouragement for the Performance of, our Christian Duty, it must needs import us highly to know, whence this so great Disparity proceeds; and how it comes to pass, that, where such Means are plentfully offered, they become so seldom effectual; I proceeded to enquire, so far as we can receive Information from this Parable, whether such Miscarriages and Disappointments are to be imputed to God, or to Mens own selves. Whether He never intended, that All who were *Called* should be *Chosen* notwithstanding their most assiduous Endeavours so to be; Or whether every one so *Called* might also have been *Chosen*, if he had not some way or other been wanting to himself, in the Improvement of such Advantages, as that Call put into his hands. To this purpose I proposed to consider, both the Case of Them, who, when the Gospel was preached to them, did not receive it; and of Those others, who did receive it, but were not saved by virtue of their doing so. The former of These is represented to us from the First to the

Eleventh Verse, under the Figure of the Obstinate *Jews*, i. e. Them who came not in, when bidden to the Marriage; The Latter, by the Man who had *not on a Wedding Garment*, who is the Representative of unsincere and Wicked Christians.

I am still engaged in the Former of these Heads, and, for our forming a Judgment of that Case more distinctly, did promise to set before you, both what this Parable relates to have been done by the King inviting his Guests; and what hindrances it takes notice of in those Guests, as the Causes of their not complying with so gracious an Invitation.

On the King's Part I shewed you the Circumstances of this Parable plainly speak Two things.

I. *The large and magnificent Preparations for entertaining the Guests;*

II. *The Desire he expressed, and the repeated Endeavours he used, that the Persons invited should partake of them.*

From these Passages explained and applied to the Matter manifestly in-

tended by this Parable, I drew some Inferences, which to me seem unavoidably to follow upon them.

1. That the Redemption of the World by the Incarnation and Death of our Blessed Saviour was an Act of God's free Mercy, and marvellous Grace.

2. That the Mercy, figured here by the *King's making a Marriage for his Son*, was intended for the Benefit of Mankind.

3. That the Design of this Benefit was Universal, or, as our Church in her excellent Catechism most truly expresses it, that the Son of God *redeemed all Mankind*.

4. That in the Methods made use of to prepare and qualify men for rendring this Universal Redemption effectual to themselves in particular, Almighty God was very serious and sincere; and did not, by any fatal Necessity decreed by his secret Will, render it impossible for them to comply with his revealed Will.

I now proceed to some Other Conclusions, for which the Passage before

as seems to be a very just Foundation. For instance.

5. *Fifthly*, We may observe from hence, that, (commonly speaking) the Manner and Method, by which God calls Men, is the Outward Ministry of his Word, and other Ordinary and Stated Means of Grace. The Servants of this King answer to God's Ministers, regularly sent and appointed in the Church: Whose established Order and Business it is to publish their Message diligently, to make the Will and gracious Intentions of their Master known to all People; to proclaim the Tidings, and explain the Terms, of Salvation; To instruct, exhort, reprove, encourage, promise, threaten, according to the Tenure of their Commission; and, by all prudent and possible Care, to urge, and prevail upon their Hearers, that they would not neglect, or obstinately refuse their own Mercy. So that our respective Congregations are to know, they meet with, and are taught by God, in the Holy Scriptures, in the blessed Sacraments, in the Prayers of the Church, and in all the Ordinances of the true Religion. It was not of our Lord's imme-

immediate Disciples alone, but of all their Lawful Successors to the World's End, that those Words in St. *Luke* are to be understood, * *He that heareth You, heareth Me; and He that despiseth You, despiseth Me; and He that despiseth Me, despiseth him that sent Me.* And whatever wild Dreams some People may have of I know not what imaginary Inward Calls; Such, I mean, as pretend to defer their Repentance, or receiving the Blessed Sacrament, or the like, upon the Notion of waiting for some powerful, distinct, and express Call; and not thinking the Arguments of their Teachers, and the unanswerable Convictions of their own Reason that these things ought to be done, sufficient Motives for going about them; These, it is much to be feared, are vain Pretences, the Delusions of Melancholy or Sloth, and dangerous Suggestions of the Tempter, who manages such Mistakes to his own wicked purposes, and knows, that Delay is the broad way to Destruction. God hath indeed provided an Inward Call, to second, and set home the Outward upon our Consciences. But he hath not any

* Luke X. 16.

See Chrysost. Tom. 5. Pag. 291. Ed. Eton.

any where that I know of (in the ordinary Dispensations of his Grace and Providence) promised any Inward Call apart from the Outward, where this may be had. He blesses, I mean, the Administration of his Word and Sacraments, and hath fitted these as proper Instruments for bringing us to himself. But he expects we should use these, that by them we may be brought to him. So that (as I had occasion to observe formerly) every Publick Sermon, every Psalm and Lesson in the Service, every Bidding of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, every pious Exhortation, Admonition, Reproof, is God's Call, and God's Message, conveyed down to us by his Ministers, and such as we must expect one day to account for. The King in this Parable interpreted the Refusal, and the Ill Treatment of his Servants, as so many Indignities done to himself; and revenged them with a Severity proportionable to an Insolence so resented. And the *Jews*, whom those ungrateful Wretches represent, were utterly destroyed, for not hearkening to such Calls as these. This is the Condemnation constantly laid

Serm. VII.

laid to their Charge, that God *sent his Prophets, and they would not hear.* And That which was Their ruine, will certainly prove Ours in the End; if We, by wicked Delays, and ſtanding out againſt the like Means, follow the Example of their Obſtinacy, and Contemptuous Behaviour.

6. *Sixthly*, From hence I take it to be evident, that this Ordinary and Outward Miniſtration mentioned in my laſt Particular, is capable of becoming a Sufficient Call, to as many as are rightly diſpoſed, and willing to make a due Improvement of it. Were not the Matter thus, how could we account for the *Jews* being ſo dreadfully puniſh'd, upon denying their Aſſent and Obedience? How for the *Gentles* ſucceeding ſo well, and receiving ſuch commendation, upon a ready complyance with ſuch Calls? Since neither is it any juſt provocation to with-hold our Obedience from, nor any Virtue or real Matter of Praiſe to give in raſhly, to Motives and Means, which are inſufficient. It is true indeed, and moſt readily confeſs'd, that all the Succeſſes of Outward Means upon

upon us, are entirely owing to the Bleſſing and Grace of God, inclining our Wills to accept and ſubmit to them. But the thing I aim at in this Particular is, To urge, that when, in ſuch repreſentations as This before us, and other-like places of Scripture, the Outward means alone are taken notice of, and no mention made of the Inward Aſſiſtances neceſſary to render them effectual; This is a fair Intimation, nay, I think I may ſay, an undenyable Argument, that God's Inward Call will not be wanting to ſecond the Outward, where men are ſincere and faithful, deſirous and diligent to examine, and conſider, to hearken to reaſon, (all Paſſions and Prejudice, and Intereſt apart,) and reſolutely ſet to follow the Dictates of God and their own Conſciences. * *To Him that hath* (ſays our Lord) that does his part, and makes the beſt of that he hath, *ſhall be given, and he ſhall have abundance.* And again, † *Him that cometh to Me, I will in no wiſe caſt out.* Nor would I here again be underſtood, as if I ſuppoſed, that even thoſe Actions or good Diſpoſitions, to which the increaſe of Grace is promiſed, are things merely

* Matth. XXV. 29.

† John VI. 37.

meerly in our own power. No such matter. Our very *Having*, our very *Coming*, are of God; His are the Talents, and His the ability of using them faithfully. *Without Him we can do nothing*, and *no man cometh* to Christ *except the Father draw him*. But still the Question is, Whether men's being not drawn be not chargeable upon some fault of their own: And if They who are not drawn, do not in some measure contribute to that unhappiness, and obstruct the kindness which God was otherwise ready to extend to them. Now thus much seems to be implyed in the many severe Reproofs and Upbraidings, in the many passionate and tender Complaints, to be met with upon these occasions. *Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life*, says our Blessed Master; and, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how oft would I have gathered thy Children, even as a Hen gathereth her Chickens under her wings, and Ye would not?* And, though our utmost efforts are of no significance without the Divine assistance, yet that this assistance is not of such a nature as to supersede our own endeavours, but that both these must go hand in hand,

John XV. 5.

V. 44.

John V. 40.

Matth. XXIII. 38.

hand, appears from that remarkable Text to the *Philippians*, where St. *Paul* presses them to *work out their own Salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who worketh in them to will and to do of his good pleasure.* To this we may add the constant custom of charging men's Faults, and Punishments, and final Destruction, upon themselves, observable throughout the whole Book of Scripture. And, where mention is made of God's hardening men's hearts, if we will make that Book consistent with it self, This is to be meant, of God's doing it by way of Judgment upon wicked Sinners, punishing the Abuse of Means by a total Deprivation of them, Mens own Folly by Infatuation; Thus blinding those Eyes which would not see, and preserving the forfeited lives of some notorious Monsters in Impiety, from that speedy death they had deserved, to make them more awakening examples to Others, by the vengeance which pursues their repeated provocations in this World. But, which comes closest up to the present purpose, The Neglects and Contempts, and Abuses, threaten'd or revenged in our Bibles, are all along such as men had Phil. II. 12, 13.

been

been guilty of towards Outward and Ordinary means. For not being won by these, they are declared inexcusable: Which yet they could not be, were they not provided with such helps, as, attended with their own Industry and Honesty, might have rendred those means successful. For this is but in other words to affirm, what the Holy Spirit frequently does, that the Sinners undoing is not from God, but from himself: not from *Him who desireth not the Death of the Wicked*, but from the Wicked who will *not turn and live*.

7. *Seventhly*, and *Lastly*, This Parable intimates to us, that, though God call men in such a manner as renders them who refuse inexcusable, yet he does it not (ordinarily, if ever at all) in such a manner as is *irresistible*. Hence it is, that we so often find men reproached with *turning their backs, stopping their ears, hardening their hearts, quenching, grieving*, and *doing despight to his Spirit*. Hence that rebuke to the Jews by St. Stephen, *Ye stiff necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your Fathers did, so also do ye.* We do with all

Acts VII. 51.

all Humility and Gratitude acknowledge, that all the Glory of our Salvation is due to His Working in us, and with us; but this will by no means oblige us to acknowledge, that our Salvation either is or can be wrought without us. We likewise see and know, that God does not call all people alike: To some he vouchsafes to speak louder as it were, and affords more powerful and awakening alarms, than he does to Others. Thus he did to St. *Paul*; but still even That Conversion, though miraculous, was in part owing to the resign'd and honest disposition of his mind, which answered to the Call from Heaven, *Lord, what wilt thou have me do?* St. *Chrysostom* hath employed a great part of one of his Sermons, to shew what a disparagement it is to the Virtue of this Great Apostle, to suppose his Conversion the Effect of Necessity. And, to prove the unreasonableness of that Opinion, He argues, that "if the Mira- "cles here had a power of working "necessarily, the same miracles must "have produced the same effects upon "all occasions. But this 'tis plain "they did not do. It was not then

Chrysost. T. 5. p. 289, 90, 91, 92. Περὶ τῆ μάκας τῶν προοιμίων.

" (says he) the Light, or Voice from " Heaven that wrought this Change, " for that Evidence the *Jews* had at " our Saviour's Baptism, and yet They " were not changed by it. It was " not his being struck down to the " Ground; for so were the Officers " who came to apprehend Jesus in the " Garden; and yet They desisted not " from their wicked attempts. It was " not his Blindness; for this was mi- " raculously inflicted upon *Elymas* " the Sorcerer too, and yet we do not " find that He was at all the better for " it. And therefore, if we will be just " to St. *Paul*'s Character, we must not " rob him of the Glory of consenting, " but must allow it to be his own Act, " and Deed, and so resolve the Success " at last into his Willingness to com- " ply with this Miracle.

After all which, and a great deal more to the same purpose, that Father proceeds in the following manner. " This is what I desire you to take spe- " cial notice of; That God does not " compel them that are unwilling. " Hence it is said, *No man cometh to* " *me, except the Father draw him.* Now " he draws the man that is willing to

" be

"be drawn, that lyes indeed, but "ſtretches out his hand to be lifted up. "And, to teach you by theſe words, "that he forces None; but if *God* be "willing, and We be not, the means of "ſalvation fall to the ground; Not be-"cauſe His Will is weak, but becauſe he "will not ſave any man againſt his "Own Will. This is very neceſſary to "be inſiſted on, becauſe ſlothful men "take Sanctuary in ſuch vain pretences, "as theſe; and, when they are urged "to the Sacraments, and a better Life, "preſently anſwer, *When God thinks "fit, he will convince, and make me a "new man.* I do not blame ſuch for "attributing this change to the Will "of God; but would have them do "their own parts, and ſo depend up-"on His good pleaſure. For if thou be "lazy and negligent, and never ſet-"teſt about a good life, and then pre-"tendeſt to wait God's leiſure, mat-"ters are never like to be better with "thee. For as I ſaid, no man is "brought to God by violence and "compulſion, but he is always ready "to ſave the willing and well-diſpo-"ſed. Men indeed command and will "have things done, whether their Ser-

" vants will or no; becauſe Maſters " among Men do not conſult their Ser- " vants advantage, but their own. But " our Maſter in Heaven, who is inde- " pendent, and would have thee ſen- " ſible, that he is not either in any " need of, or at all better by, any " thing we can do, deſires our Obedi- " ence, purely for our own advantage; " And if we pay this with becoming " thankfulneſs, we ſerve not any occa- " ſions of His, but reap all the profit " of it our ſelves. And therefore He " will not preſs the unwilling and " refractory into his Service, thereby " to ſhew, that He is not beholding to " Us for ſerving, but We to Him for " commanding.

From all this it may appear, that the Difference of the Diſpoſition is the main thing, which makes the Succeſs of one man differ from that of another, in the uſe of the means of Grace. 'Twas This diſtinguiſh'd the perſons in the Parable: This hindred them who were firſt bidden from coming to the Feaſt; and brought in the wanderers laſt call'd, from the High-ways: It rendred (that is) the Preaching and Miracles of our Saviour of ſo great effect to thoſe who

in

in all appearance were least, and of so little to them who were most likely to have profited by them. It is the fondest imagination in the world, to complain, that we cannot edify by our Ministers, and to have Their persons in undue admiration or Contempt. Alas! we judge quite wrong in this matter. The Success of the Doctrine depends principally, not upon the Speaker but, the Hearers. The Tongues of Men or Angels signifie little, if the Heart of those who receive the word, do not receive it with meekness and pure Affection. And the Seed of Grace, as well as that of the Word, may be Scattered to no purpose, though the Sower distribute it with never so liberal a hand, if the Ground Sown be like the Way-side, or the Rock, or the Thorns. In short, the *Jews* have put this point beyond all dispute; who were neither convinced by all the wonders *Jesus* could do, nor perswaded by all that he could say; And yet at the same time, he declares, *he did among them the works which no other man did*; and they confess, he *spoke as never man spoke.*

II. This leads me to consider, in the Next place, those Hinderances, by which They heretofore, and Wicked men proportionably in all Ages of the World, are kept back from the acknowledgment of the Truth. In order whereunto we must consider the Behaviour of these unthankful Subjects, who refused their King's most importunate Invitations. Now these the Parable hath distributed into Three Sorts, and in each of them hath pointed out a particular Spirit, which seems to have been the Occasion of their Stubbornness and Contempt.

1. The First of these I take to be meant by Them, who, as the Third Verse tells us, *would not come*. And these men's Indisposition seems to be Pride and Disrespect. Such were They, who took offence at the meanness of the Son of God's appearance in the Flesh. A reputed Carpenter's Son, attended with a few illiterate Fishermen; addressing himself to persons of all Conditions, with all the marks of Humility, and Meekness, and Condescension; Living in a State of Poverty, and

dying

dying in all the Circumstances of Ignominy and Scorn, and Reproach. These things gave great disgust to the *Jews*; whose minds, prepossessed with false notions of a *Messiah*, expected a temporal Prince and Conquerour; one that should make his way, and erect his Throne, by all the awful methods of Pomp, and Splendour, and Bloody Victories. And therefore finding *Jesus* make a Figure so very opposite to what they had conceived of Christ, they treated Him and his Doctrine with the utmost Contumely and Disdain.

And in Those mens steps may all They be very justly esteem'd to tread at this day, who look upon Christianity as a low and despicable dispensation; A Religion cut out only for such as its first Preachers were, but below men of Letters, and Honour, and Condition: Who are scandalized at the Cross of Christ, and make the Death he submitted to for our sakes a Subject of scornful Railery and profane Scoffs: Who despise the Gospel, as a System of Faith and Morality, fit only for such credulous and easy, such poor and little Souls, as

can give up their Assent to Mysteries above their comprehension, can tamely put up injuries and affronts, crucify themselves to the World in hope of unseen and very distant Rewards, renounce the present pleasures of Sin, engage in a perpetual War with sensual Appetite, and stand in awe of that Bugbear, Conscience. To what purpose can it be, to invite Men of such a carnal Palate to this Spiritual Feast? Before those Calls can have effect, they must abandon their false Notions of Gallantry, and Greatness, and Good Sense. They must be brought down to such a Temper, as is fit to be treated with, will hearken to better Instruction, and is content to acknowledge, *That* God is wiser than We; And, *that* He is the best Judge, what Virtues are best qualified to perfect the Nature himself gave us, and what measures were most proper to be taken for repairing the breaches Sin had made upon it: *That* He, who alone can forgive Sin, hath alone right to determine upon what conditions it shall be forgiven, and to choose his own Sacrifice: And, *that* it becomes lost Wretches to admire and adore his Good-

Goodness, and to conclude, that the Methods of their Redemption were certainly adjusted with infinite Wisdom; what Foolishness soever vain Man, when proceeding upon the false principles of Worldly prudence, might be apt to suspect in them. Till this *superfluity of Naughtiness* be pruned away, till Men entertain reverent apprehensions of God, and are satisfied, that *His ways are not as Our Ways, nor His thoughts as Our Thoughts*, though ten thousand Messages were sent to call them to *the Marriage*, they are like to continue the same sturdy, haughty Jews still; and *will not come* in.

2. Another sort are mentioned v. 5. who, upon pretence of some more important concerns, made *light of* this Feast, and went, *One to his Farm, Another to his Merchandise.* They gave the Messengers the hearing, but did not think the Invitation worth acceptance, when it must hinder other Business. And such are all They now, whom Riches, and Preferments, and worldly Cares keep from becoming good Christians. The Feast is what they like well enough, provided the King would so far condescend, as to ad-

admit them, when they are at leiſure to wait on him. They have nothing to object againſt Religion, but confeſs the advantages it offers to be very noble and alluring; And Good Men they fully deſign to be at ſome more convenient Seaſon; But at preſent their hands are ſo full, that till they can diſengage themſelves of ſome weighty and indiſpenſable affairs, it is not poſſible for them to attend to that, which they wiſh with all their hearts they were free for. Now here is the main Difficulty, that God will not accept of divided Affections; This Feaſt requires a new Appetite, and a refined Taſt; it expects the Chief of our Pains, and the moſt ſerious of our Thoughts. This is the *Camel*, that cannot get *through the Eye of the Needle*, and renders it impoſſible for ſuch, as *truſt*, and delight, and place their happineſs in *Riches*, or any preſent Enjoyments, ſo as for their ſakes to neglect and diſeſteem a future and Spiritual Good, even *to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*. But with theſe Men I propoſe to diſcourſe more particularly hereafter, and ſhall therefore wave entring into the Argument with them now.

Mark X. 24. 25.

Serm. XI.

3. A *Third* Sort of People, yet worse than both the former, we read of at the *sixth Verse*; who, not content to reject the Invitation, fell foul upon them that brought it; They took *the Servants, and entreated them spightfully, and slew them.* These gave themselves no trouble about making excuses, but added to their perverse Rudeness, Cruelty, and Malice, and Rage; or, to say the softest thing such behaviour will bear, the Fury of an undisciplin'd and mistaken Zeal. And how blind, how blood-thirsty this was, our Lord hath acquainted us, in that prediction of his Disciples Sufferings, that *the time was* coming, when *whosoever killed them, should think he did God Service.* Such were heretofore the Crucifiers of our Blessed Saviour. Such the Persecutors of the Apostles and Primitive Christians; And such are all those still, who openly oppose the Name of Christ, vilifie his Ministers, and are profess'd Patrons of Infidelity, and Profaneness; Such also They, who, under pretence of more vigorously promoting or maintaining what they call the Truth, attack those of a contrary opinion with Sword, and Fire, and John XVI. 2.

and Faggot: Who rend and tear their Saviour's Myſtical Body in ſunder; and advance that (not unchriſtian only, but even) unnatural Principle, that it is the duty of One Member, to pluck out, and to cut off Another.

That which aggravates the Ingratitude of theſe Refuſals yet more, is the very nature of the Invitation it ſelf. Now This was not to Labour and Hardſhip, but to a Marriage, a Feaſt of Joy, a King's Feaſt; To which it is a mark of ſingular favour, and a mighty condeſcenſion, to be ſo ſollicitouſly importun'd, ſo kindly received. And the Chriſtian Religion is very fitly reſembled by this Figure, both in compariſon of that Yoke of Servitude it delivers us from, and with regard to the exquiſite Satisfactions, the unſpeakable Glories, which all who embrace it ſincerely are thereby made partakers of. Had we been call'd to Toil and great Drudgery, even ſo God had a right to command our Obedience; Had he bid us do ſome unprofitable, ſome very harſh and unpleaſant thing, we ought not to have declin'd it. How much rather ſhould we comply, when he ſays,

Come

Come unto the Marriage? And sure this single Circumstance, that Men will not be perswaded to their own advantage, is sufficicient to shew us, where the fault truly lyes: And that, when the Master of the Feast, after having made such provision for his Guests, and done so much to bring them to it, is requited only with Slights, and Obstinacy, and Malice; Wicked Men are reprobated and shut out, not because God did not do all that it became a gracious King to do; but, because, when they were bidden in the most affectionate manner, yet they were not, would not be, worthy.

II. Having spoken so largely to the case of Them, who when the Gospel is preached to them, do not receive it; I come now very briefly to consider That Other, of *such as do entertain and profess, but yet are not saved by it.* For This answers to the Person, who did come, and yet was afterwards thrust out for want of a *Wedding-Garment.* What this Garment signifies, seems not very hard to be understood. Most Interpreters agree it to be *Good Works in general,* to which I would only beg leave to add,

add, *such works done out of a Principle of ſincere Obedience.* For, ſince the want of this Garment does not appear to have been diſcovered, till the Maſter came in to ſee and examine the Gueſts; though the Circumſtances in Parables are not to be too curiouſly inſiſted upon, yet I preſume it is not amiſs to take in Inward Holineſs here, in oppoſition to a diſſembled formal Shew of Religion. Now This is what may be ſo nicely wrought, that no humane Eye ſhall be able to diſtinguiſh it. But God will be ſure to unmask the Hypocrite; He ſees through all our Diſguiſes, and will one day ſever, not only between the openly Righteous and the Wicked; but between Him that is Righteous in reality, and Him that is ſo in Affectation and Appearance only.

This then is a ſeaſonable warning to all of us, that *our Converſation be ſuch as becomes the Goſpel of Chriſt*; that we take care to *be renewed in the Spirit of our Mind, and to put on the Inward Man, which after God is formed according to Righteouſneſs and true Holineſs*; that we *ſanctifie the Lord God in*, and *Do his will from, our Hearts.*

Phil. I. 27. Epheſ. IV. 23, 24. 1 Pet. III. 15. Epheſ. VI. 6.

This

This proves, that our being received into the Number and Congregation of the Faithful, partaking in the same Priviledges, and the same Instructions, joyning in the same Prayers, and the same Sacraments; doing some outward acts of Piety and Charity: that All this, I say, will avail us nothing, if our hearts be rotten at the bottom; if we be not sincere, and stedfast, and uniform in our Duty. Such Men may impose upon the World, and by degrees upon Themselves too; but, *Be not deceived*, there is a stricter Search to come, and *God is not*, cannot be, *mocked*. A Man may lie within Christ's fold, and yet be no better than a *Wolf in Sheeps Clothing*: But the Shepherd will be sure to find him out, and to deal with him accordingly. In a word, it is not the *Form* but the *Power of Godliness*, that must save us. This unworthy Comer did no more eat of the Feast, than They who came not at all: And at the Last day, the matter will come much to one, whether we be reckoned among *Hypocrites* or *Unbelievers*; since the Great Judge hath already declared, that the Portion of both shall be in a *place of dark-* Matth. XXIV. 51.

Luk. XII. 46. *darkness and weeping, and gnashing of Teeth.*

Now that this walking unworthy our Christian Profession, as well as not professing Christ at all, is from our own fault, I need not, after what hath been said already, take any pains to prove. It may suffice to refer my Reader back to the former Considerations; since the very same Advantages and Assistances, afforded Men for disposing them to believe the Truth, are at least as plentifully afforded for disposing them to practise it, when they do believe it; And the very same Indispositions and vicious Qualities which hinder men from entertaining the Christian Doctrine, do likewise obstruct the conforming their lives in good earnest, to the Doctrines they entertain. The same is farther manifest from this Person's punishment here, and from his being *Speechless*; struck dumb with Guilt and Confusion. Which fairly intimates to us, what is most certainly true; That, of all Men living, They who pretend to be Christians will have least to say in their own excuse, if they lead wicked lives: since This is in effect to profess one Rule,

Rule, and led by another; and to live, not only in opposition to God and his Laws, but under a perpetual upbraiding of their own Breasts, and in a perfect and constant contradiction to themselves.

Now All this tends directly to the End I chiefly aimed at in the Choice of this Subject. Which is, to remove those discouragements to Repentance and a Good Life, which some weak Minds may labour under, from a mistaken Notion, that these things will, either be done without us, or not effectually attain'd even by our most laborious and conscientious Endeavours. And though it may be objected, that Parables afford but little matter for solid Argument; yet the Cause I have undertaken will not be much weakned by that pretence, if it be remembred, that we may, and ought to argue from Parables, so far as the Reason and Main Design of them leads us; And that nothing here hath been advanced beyond that, which is not (I hope sufficiently) evinced by other express Texts of Scripture. Let us not then flatter our selves with little Shifts, and take Sanctuary in the dark excuses of

abſolute Reprobation and Election; For, be aſſured, that, at the General Day of Account, a new and different Scene of things ſhall open: And what Cloaks ſoever Men may contrive to cover their ſhame in the mean while, every mouth ſhall then be laid in the duſt, *All fleſh ſhall not only be, but acknowledge it ſelf to be guilty before God; And He be juſtified in all his Doings, and clear when he is judged.*

The Sum then of what hath been ſaid upon the matter is This: *That* God *calls* freely, whom, and when, and how he pleaſes; that every body is *Called* to whom the Word of Salvation is ſent; and Called in ſuch a manner, that if They, who live under the diſpenſation of the Goſpel, do not hear, and receive, and profit by it, the Fault and the Puniſhment will be Theirs. That this hearing and receiving, or (which is the ſame thing) *coming when Called*, implies, not only a Belief of what our Saviour hath taught, but living in agreement to the Principles Chriſtians profeſs to believe; That They who wilfully fail in either of theſe Points, cannot be of the Number of God's *Choſen*: They may be

Called,

Called, and not *Come*; they may *Come*, and yet be thrust out as unworthy. And none are the *Chosen*, but such as partake of the Feast. From whence we may infer, that the Election of God proceeds upon certain Terms and Qualifications; And, although Men are *Called* by an Act of Mercy purely arbitrary, and without any respect to their Behaviour, yet they are not *Chosen*, so. Freely indeed they are, because not for any desert or real worth of their Best Works; but conditionally still, because not without Good Works. So that these Works, though incapable of being the *Meritorious*, are yet the *Instrumental* Cause of our *Election* and Salvation. Hence *Theophylact* says, *That we are Called is entirely God's act; but whether we be Chosen or no, will depend upon our Selves.* Hence much more incontestable Authority than His warns Christians, *that they give diligence to make their Calling and Election sure*: Which implies, that without their own diligence these things will not be secured to them. And indeed, as the Commentator I just now mentioned observes, Because God is so very kind and bountiful in

Theoph. in loc.

2 Pet. I. 10.

doing His part, and Men ſo very negligent and inſenſible in Theirs; He bids, but *they who are bidden are not worthy*; this is the true reaſon, why ſo *many are called*, and yet ſo *few are choſen*.

I diſcharge my ſelf of this Subject, with that eminent paſſage of the Son of *Strach*, very appoſite to our preſent purpoſe. *Say not thou, It is through*

Eccluſ. XV 11. *the Lord that I fell away, for thou oughteſt not to do the things that he hateth.*

12. *Say not thou, He hath cauſed me to err, for he hath no need of the ſinful man.*

14. *God made man from the beginning, and*

15. *left him in the hand of his Counſel: if thou wilt, to keep the Commandments, and to perform acceptable Righteouſneſs.*

17. *Before man is Life and Death, and whether him liketh, that ſhall be given him.*

20. *But the Lord hath commanded no man to do wickedly, neither hath he given any man licenſe to ſin.*

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt, Three Perſons, and One God, be all Honour and Glory for evermore. *Amen.*

SERM

SERMON XI.

WORLDLY HINDRANCES No EXCUSE For the Neglect of *Religious Duties.*

St. Luke XIV. *V.* 23, 24.

And the Lord said unto the Servant, Go out into the High-ways and Hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled:

For I say unto you, that none of those men, which were bidden, shall taste of my Supper.

THE Divine Discourses, with which our Lord entertained the Company, while dining with one of the chief *Pharisees*, made *V.* 1.

ſuch impreſſion upon them, that a certain Perſon then at meat with him,
V. 15. broke out into theſe words, *Bleſſed is He, that ſhall eat bread in the Kingdom of God.*

Hereupon our Saviour takes occaſion to ſhew, that this Bleſſedneſs, great as it is, was not however embraced with that eagerneſs and ſatisfaction, nor ſought with all that induſtry, which it moſt juſtly deſerved. And, for the Illuſtration of this ſad Truth, the Succeſſes of the Goſpel, and the different Reception it found among Men, are repreſented under the Figure
V. 16. of a *Great Supper* prepared, and the Behaviour of the Gueſts invited to it. Some abſenting themſelves upon frivolous pretences; Others rudely refuſing the Civility; And the Maſter of the Feaſt by this means driven to furniſh his Table, with ſtrangers of a meaner Quality; and full of juſt Indignation and Reſentment againſt thoſe unworthy People, who denied to grace his Houſe with their preſence, and put ſuch a ſlight upon his kindneſs.

This is the Subſtance of the Parable, and the Applications of it are various. For, whether we reſpect the Firſt eminent

nent discrimination made between the *Jews* and the *Gentiles*; Or whether That more continuing one, of the several Degrees and Qualifications of Men in all Ages and Countries; It sets before our Eyes a lively Image of Both, and is, in Either sense, capable of great Use for our Instruction and Improvement.

Concerning the Former of These, wherein the *Jews* and *Gentiles* are concerned, I have * already spoken so largely, that it will be needless again to insist upon it. And therefore the only Reflection I shall make at present upon this sense of the Parable, regards one expression peculiar to this place. Which is, That those *Gentiles* fetched from the *High-ways* and *Hedges*, are said here to be *Compelled to come in*; Not from any external or irresistible Necessity made use of to reduce them; But by the Evidence of Miracles, By the powerful Convictions of Truth, By the strength of Arguments, By repeated Messages, By all the prevailing Arts of a holy Importunity; Which subdued their Wills, and brought over their Affections, and, in a manner, extorted their Assent, while Lust and

*Serm. IX. x.

Worldly Inclinations perſwaded the contrary. So that this Expreſſion of *Compelling*, means only an exceeding Care, and ſolicitous Application to win them over; And the marvellous Efficacy of thoſe Methods at laſt, notwithſtanding the Appetites of corrupt Nature, the Prejudices of Education and long Cuſtom, and all the Difficulties, which the Habits and the Love of Evil could raiſe in Minds violently bent againſt any ſuch Compliance. And, when They had thus accepted the Invitation, then follows a ſevere, though moſt deſerved ſentence of utter Excluſion, upon thoſe other inſenſible ungrateful Creatures, who had provoked this Good Man of the Houſe, and affronted his Intentions of favour toward them, by the obſtinacy and folly of excluding themſelves.

To proceed then. The Relation this Parable bears to Perſons of ſeveral Degrees and Qualifications, whether *Jews* or *Gentiles*, is not leſs worthy our regard. The Event of the Goſpel's firſt ſetting out, ſo different among the Poor, the Unlettered, the notorious Sinners; from what it was with the Wealthy, the Learned, the ſeeming Righteous.

Righteous. The Men of ſplendid Fortunes and eminent Poſts deriding its Doctrines of Humility and Meekneſs, Self-denial and Contempt of the World; while thoſe of inferior Condition, whoſe Spirits and Tempers were of a ſize with their Eſtates, ſubmitted gladly to Them. The perſons of Study and Attainments deluding themſelves with vain Sophiſtry, and ſcorning the ſublime Myſteries of its Faith; while thoſe of Honeſter Minds, and Leſs Subtlety ſubdued their Reaſon, and brought every proud aſpiring Thought into Captivity to the Power, and Wiſdom, and Truth of God. The pretenders to Sanctity, and rigid Obſervers of Ceremony and Tradition, preſuming upon their own Merits for Juſtification; while Others, of a Converſation more liable to Cenſure, with thanks and joy inexpreſſible, laid hold on the Sacrifice and Propitiation of Another; and, conſcious of the Impotence of Works alone, ſought Salvation by the *Righteouſneſs of Faith*. So that, in each of theſe reſpects, thoſe who *were bidden*, that is, who had received moſt from God, and ought to have been the forwardeſt in Duty

to

to him; ſtood out; And They, whoſe Character was leſs conſiderable, and leſs could be expected from, were found moſt ready to expreſs their ſenſe of his Goodneſs, and moſt deſirous to partake of it.

Once more; There is yet Another Interpretation of this Parable, accommodated to the Circumſtances of thoſe People, among whom the Goſpel is already profeſs'd, and eſtabliſhed. For the End of Our Teaching and of Your Believing being Practice, as the End of that Practice is the Saving of Men's Souls; The Kingdom of Glory hereafter is no leſs ſhadowed out by this Feaſt, than the Kingdom of Grace here. And conſequently, All that neglect their Duty, and prefer the Buſineſs, or Enjoyments of This World, before their Concern for the Next, do refuſe the Invitations to this Spiritual Supper, and incur the Guilt and the Condemnation implied in the Text; As, on the Other hand, They, who, notwithſtanding all the diſadvantages of Perſon or Fortune, conform to the Rules of holy Living, and make Heaven their firſt and greateſt care; Theſe are the Men who fill the Houſe, and partake

take of that Supper. And, This ſignification being equally proper, and more pertinent and ſuitable to Our Condition than Either of the Former; I ſhall endeavour to fix my own and your attention upon it, by conſidering theſe two General Heads:

First, *The Juſtice of thoſe Men's loſing Heaven and Happineſs, who, for any Worldly Reſpects, refuſe the proffers of it made to them.*

Secondly, *The Great Mercy and Goodneſs of God in the means uſed for the Converſion of thoſe who do accept, and profit under, them.* For upon theſe Two Points the whole Subſtance of the Paſſage turns, and They together make up the Moral of this Figurative Repreſentation.

1. Let us conſider, *First*, The Juſtice of God in debarring thoſe Men any Acceſs to Heaven and Happineſs hereafter, who refuſe the proffers of it made to them here. For that is the Importance of the Twenty fourth Verſe, *I ſay unto You, that none of Thoſe men which were bidden, ſhall taſte of my Supper.*

Supper. This, though last in order of the Text, yet because depending upon that which is first in the Parable, I chuse to begin with. And, for the clearer Manifestation of the Matter before us, These two things should be attended to:

(1.) *The Character and Condition of the Refusers*; and then,

(2.) *The Insufficiency of those Excuses they made for themselves.*

I. *The Character and Condition of them who absented, is easily to be gathered from the Excuses made to soften their Refusal.* Three whereof are positively alledged here, as sent back by Three Persons respectively. The first said, * *I have bought a piece of Ground, and I must needs go and see it*; The second is, *I have bought five Yoke of Oxen, and I go to prove them*; And the third, *I have married a Wife, and therefore I cannot come.* The Two former of These will fall under the same denomination, and the ground of their absenting seems to proceed from the same Cause; Which is, *The Love of the World,*

* *V.* 18, 19, 20.

World, and immoderate purſuits of Buſineſs and Riches. For, the Wealth of thoſe *Eaſtern* Countries conſiſting partly in Land, and partly in Cattel, Avarice is the diſtemper common to them both. The Third is more properly reduced to *Love of Pleaſure*, and *Fondneſs of Senſual Delights*; which carries ſome ſigns of a worſe and more untractable Diſpoſition along with it. Thus much Some have thought intimated, by the differing Forms in which the Anſwers are returned. For, whereas the Purchaſers of Land and Oxen, make a ſhew at leaſt of Civility and Modeſty, deſire the Servant to make their Excuſe, and expreſs ſome ſort of Concern, that their Weightier Affairs detain'd them; He that had *married a Wife*, in a more blunt and ſullen manner, replies roughly, *I cannot come*; A Reply, which ſpeaks that Air of Scorn, uſual in Men abandoned to *Senſe*, and *Appetite*; Who diſdain every Thing and every Perſon, whoſe Buſineſs and Aim it is to divert them from ſuch preſent Gratifications. This likewiſe is farther remarkable in all Three; That our Lord introduces, not the bold and daring Sinners, defiers of God

God and good Manners, and such as by long shameless Vice have worn out all Distinctions between Good and Evil; But such as indulge those Cares, and those Pleasures only, which in their own Nature are lawful and allowable. He sets before us, not the Vile Oppressor, the Impious Perjured, or the Actors of Violence and Rapine, of Forgery or Fraud; But Men intent upon their own Affairs, Patterns of Provident and Honest Industry, so far as the Quality of the Things themselves is concerned. Had he done otherwise, we should be apt to fancy, that no degree of Anxiety had been Criminal, so long as our hands were clean of Injustice and Deceit; As we were cautious not to heap polluted Treasures, nor give our selves the liberty of being foul and dishonest in our Dealings. Or Had he instanced in Adulterers, in Lewd and Impudent Sensuality, that prostitutes Mens Souls, their Bodies, their Tongues, to Filthiness and Lust; We might imagine none could be to blame, in giving scope to loose Desires, and fleshly Satisfactions; And that no Bounds, no Laws restrained our Pleasures, where Modesty and Decency

Decency were obſerved, where no Man's Property had been Invaded, no injured Bed, or violated Honour, could be laid to our Charge. But now by producing honeſt Purchaſes, and honourable Marriage, he plainly teaches us, That even the moſt Innocent Profits and Pleaſures may ceaſe to be Innocent in our manner of uſing them. As, If they engroſs our Hearts, and draw us off from better Thoughts and Practices; If they intrude upon our ſpiritual Affairs, vitiate our Affections, and, in a word, grow to Exceſs, or prove Unſeaſonable. For, how reaſonable ſoever theſe Allegations appear'd to thoſe who made them here, and do no doubt ſtill, to Millions more that urge them daily; yet you ſee they found no favour with Almighty God. Theſe Men of Honeſt Buſineſs, and Innocent Delights, are notwithſtanding declared to be unworthy; and all their Avocations, ſuppoſing them both real and important, could not, nor ever will acquit the Perſons, or bear out their refuſal to attend upon higher Duties. Theſe are the *Bidden*, the *Ungrateful Wretches*, whom Chriſt rejects with Anger, and not one of them is admitted

to

to *taſte of his Supper.* Which brings me to the ſecond branch of this Argument.

II. *The Inſufficiency of thoſe Excuſes made for not complying with this Invitation.* And This appears much more from the Thing deſigned by the Parable, than it does by any expreſs word in the Parable it ſelf. There we are left to gather, that there was Reaſon good, why the Gueſts ſhould have preferred this Feaſt, before their own Worldly Advantages, and Delights. But, in the Benefits of the Goſpel, Goodneſs and Truth in This, and Glory in the next, Life; the Obligation and Neceſſity of making theſe our firſt care, approves it ſelf to every common Underſtanding. As will ſoon appear, Whether the *Perſon Inviting*, the *Feaſt it ſelf*, or the *Cauſes that detain Men from attending it*, be regarded.

1. *The Perſon Inviting us is God.* And this alone is cauſe ſufficient why we ſhould come. In Humane Converſation we may make great Diſtinctions; and proportion our Reſpects according to the Quality, or the Friendſhip, of thoſe that ask our Company. With Them, whom

whom Birth or Fortune make our Equals, we can be bold, and uſe thoſe Liberties, which good Breeding will forbid to Them above us. And, if a mighty Prince, or kind Benefactor, a Patron and a Friend require our Preſence, all our Affairs muſt be diſpenſed with; all Buſineſs and Diverſion laid aſide, to teſtify our Gratitude and Honour, and nothing waited on but He. Shall we not then obey the Gracious Offer, when the Great King of Heaven, and Lord of Lords, vouchſafes to call us? He is our Beſt, our Only Friend; from Him we derive all our Comforts, all our Hopes, nay even our very Selves; He commands all our Love and Thanks, and He deſerves them all. To ſuffer other Objects to poſſeſs our Hearts, in Oppoſition to, or Competition with Him, is a fault; and to divide our Affections is to rob him. Our Mind, our Soul, our Strength, the Whole of Theſe is his juſt Tribute; and thoſe Men are falſe, unthankful, and unjuſt, who put the trifles of a periſhing Life, into the balance with their God and Duty. For how reaſonable ſoever our regards may be to theſe things, when conſidered in themſelves,

ſelves, and with relation to our preſent Conveniences; yet they loſe all their value, and ceaſe to be of any Conſideration, when ſet againſt our Obedience to that Great King, this Gracious Maſter, this kindeſt of all Friends. Would the Hungry and the Naked, think you, object, that Work and Begging muſt be followed, when ſent for by his Prince, allowed to tread his Courts, and eat at his Table? Yet ſuch and greater is the Diſtance between Almighty God, and all the Sons of Men. The pooreſt Begger, and the meaneſt Slave, is leſs beneath the Majeſty of Monarchs, Than even thoſe Monarchs are below the Majeſty of God. Yet does this God invite, yea does He importune us, *Such is the honour all his Servants have.* Well then may that great Maſter of the Feaſt be angry, when ſuch deny his favour, and put him off with vain pretences. He cannot but condemn them, and they, if they would reflect or think at all, muſt needs condemn their own folly, For (which is more) Theſe Calls are not to our Duty only, but to our Intereſt too; as will appear, if we now deſcend to conſider,

2. *The*

2. *The Nature of the Feast it self, and what is figured by it.*

2. When Men provide their dainty Meats, some weightier Matters may come in between, and hinder the paying our respects. And in such case our loss is not very considerable; A courser Meal at home, instead of higher feeding, which Nature misses not, will serve the turn as well. But here the Feast is very Sustenance and Life, the only Thing by which our Souls subsist; and They, who do not come hither, must look for nothing, but Languishing and Death, Despair and Misery. For our Condition lies in wide Extremes, it admits no middle State betwixt Heaven and Hell; and they who do not *eat Bread* with Saints and Angels *in the Kingdom of God*; are cast for ever into utter Darkness, and pass infinite Ages in weeping and wailing, and gnashing of Teeth; in Regions of Horror, and the dismal Society of Fiends and Devils. When therefore this Proffer, mentioned in the Parable, is made to needy Man; when He is called to sit and feed with God; The Invitation is, to fill our Souls with all manner of Graces and Virtues now;

and with all the fullneſs of Eternal Bliſs, when Death tranſlates them to another State. This is to ask them if they will be Happy; Happy beyond their deſert, beyond their comprehenſion, beyond their largeſt wiſhes and deſires. It is to call, to preſs them to it. And Who in his right mind will deny ſuch a proffer as this? Who can ſuppoſe, that Any engagement ought to obſtruct him in the purſuit of it? Who can excuſe ſo unreaſonable a refuſal, I do not ſay, to God, but to His own ſelf? Moſt certain it is, All Men agree in this deſign, of being Happy: All ſeek the ſame End, though they ſeek it by different means. But 'tis as certain too, that He, who made us, and our Happineſs, hath told us, That in *His preſence alone is true Joy*; and They who do not ſeek, They who do not accept it there, whatever ſatisfactions elſe they may find or fancy, all theſe will prove but flattering empty dreams at laſt; and *good were it for ſuch men if they had never been born.*

3. *The Cauſes Parallel to thoſe aſſigned in the Parable for keeping Men away, deſerve to be cloſely conſidered.* For the Love of Riches, the Incumbrances of

a worldly Life, and the Indulging of Sensual Delights, are of very fatal Consequence to the Soul. It may be alledged indeed, in their vindication and excuse, that the Parable supposes them to be only such Cares, and such Pleasures, as in their own nature are honest and unblameable. But yet this does not acquit those of guilt who are too eager in the pursuit of them. For it is the part of a Good, as well as a Wise Man, to carry his Eye forward to the Consequences of Things; And the Christian Religion expects, that we should no more addict our selves to those Passions and Engagements, which are sure to have ill effects upon us, than to those that have an inherent malignity, and are downright vicious in themselves. So that, although the Concerns of a Man's Calling, and the prudent contrivances of raising a Fortune fairly, though every gratification of our fleshly Appetites, Every recreating of the Mind, be not absolutely forbidden; yet when they exceed in their Measures, when they get within us, and gain upon our Affections, when they loosen our Principles, and detain us from matters of a higher and more

laſting Importance; they then become ſinful. And for this reaſon ought they to be uſed always with great Temper and Moderation, becauſe they are apt to betray us to theſe Inconveniences. The Dangers riſing from them are not the leſs, but in ſome reſpects greater, becauſe the Things are lawful. For of thoſe Men, who are not utterly abandoned to Wickedneſs and a Reprobate Mind, More, it is probable, periſh by the abuſe of Innocent and Good things, than by the Love or the Commiſſion of things poſitively Evil. In theſe the Offence ſoon manifeſts it ſelf; Here Reproof, Reaſon, and Remorſe of Conſcience, ſtrike in, and check an open breach of Duty; There needs not much ſagacity to diſcern things palpably unlawful; But where the Fact it ſelf, or the Object we are converſant about, does not fall under ſuch plain Cenſure, there it is eaſie to miſtake in Circumſtances and Degrees. For here Men neither have, nor can have, any certain Rule to guide them; The Meaſures of Buſineſs and Pleaſure are not to be fixed, but vary daily; According to the Conſtitution of the Perſon,

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The Neceſſities of his Condition, The preſent face and juncture of Affairs, and a thouſand other unforeſeen Emergencies; So that more or leſs may be allowed, to One Perſon, or at One Time, or upon One Occaſion, than can to another. All the Direction this caſe is capable of, is only that we avoid Irregularity and Exceſs, but We are Judges ſtill of that Irregularity and Exceſs, for Chriſtian Prudence is the only thing that can determine it. And from hence proceeds the Hazard of ſuch actions, That Men are apt to be too partial to the ſide of the World and the Fleſh; They know theſe things are not directly ſinful, and This ſupports them in the love and practice of them; This gives them Confidence and great Security, and they are very hardly brought to acknowledge or to mend a fault, or to impoſe ſevere reſtraints in thoſe caſes, where God permits a Liberty and Uſe of the thing in Queſtion. And beſides, Here the Neceſſities and Comforts of Life fall in, and add freſh force to the Argument. Eaſe, and Subſiſtence, and the Care of Families, when ſeconded and urg'd by Inclination, find it an eaſie matter

to influence the Reaſon, and over-bear Religion too in time. Men know and own, that God is to be ſerved; but the ſame God, they tell you, hath ſo ordained, that their Neceſſities and Conveniences ſhould be ſerved too; And therefore He (they hope) will not forget, that they obey him even in theſe cares; and cannot take it ill, if their attendance upon his Will in the Conſtitutions of his Providence, ſhould interfere now and then with their obſervance of his Laws and Worſhip; For both they cannot do; They wiſh with all their hearts they could; but they truſt they ſerve him very acceptably even in what they do.

Such are the vain pretences, which worldly-minded People make, to cover that neglect of God, which they are aſhamed to confeſs; and to ruine their own Souls by deceitful colours of honeſt and lawful Practices. But pray my Friends Conſider; God ſets us in the World; and, for our humiliation, hath appointed us a life of Trouble and Induſtry, and Labour. By Theſe he gives leave, nay he commands, that we ſhould provide for our ſelves, and thoſe that depend upon us; But

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he does not mean that this ſhould extend ſo far, as to ſhut out Him, from our Regard and our Thoughts. We are to uſe; but we are not to ſerve the World. God gave Man large Dominions, and made him Lord of the Creatures here below. But when our hopes, our labours, and our delights, are placed upon theſe objects; we then degrade our ſelves, loſe our Original Prerogative, and that Dominion turns to Slavery. We ſhould enjoy the Gift, and love the Giver, but we muſt not ſlight the Giver; and dote upon the Gift. We muſt employ ſome time upon our Buſineſs; A greater or leſs proportion of time according as our buſineſs happens; But Body and Eſtate muſt not ſwallow the Soul; The concerns of a moment muſt not be preferr'd to Eternity; Nor may we ever follow the World ſo cloſe, as not to be at leiſure to be ſaved. This may take up Some of our Love and our Thoughts, but God muſt always reign, and ſit Supreme, in all our Thoughts and Endeavours, and Affections. And therefore mighty caution and reſerve is neceſſary in this matter of Worldly cares, becauſe the Preſent is exceeding apt

apt to engroſs us, and we know who hath told us, that * *God* and *Mammon cannot both be ſerved.* In ſhort, All we do, and All we ſeek here below, muſt be in ſubordination to ſomewhat nobler and better above; and ſhould never be permitted to juſtle out our firſt and great Concern, *Gods Righteouſneſs and Kingdom.* When this Great Maſter of the Feaſt invites us, we muſt leave all, and follow Him; prefer His Proviſion before our Own, and readily obey the gracious Summons. Heaven and our Souls require the beſt of our Care; And, believe me, it is not a little care that will ſuffice for theſe purpoſes. Our Paſſions muſt be mortified; our Deſires reſigned; our Affections raiſed and fixed upon a better Country. And this is a work that will ask more of our time and pains, than men ſeem generally well aware of. Let any of us but make the Experiment; Let a man ſingle out One darling Luſt, and ſee how many conflicts, how long practice it will coſt him, perfectly to ſubdue That One. And this will ſoon convince him, how unreaſonable it is, to think Salvation a Work by the by; and how unworthy they

* Matth. VI. 24.

are

are of Eternal happineſs, who will afford no time for Religion, but meerly that which hangs upon their hands; How impudent a thing it is to ſerve God, only when we have nothing elſe to do; How unequally thoſe Men divide themſelves, who ſpend ſo much upon the World, and ſo little upon Heaven; who pretend periſhing Intereſts and Engagements, and involve themſelves in endleſs Purſuits and Projects, about the leſs, the trifling advantages; and leave no time for the greater and more ſubſtantial. This is our Caſe, and This is our Danger, when even the moſt Lawful cares employ us; That they ſteal away our Hearts, and take poſſeſſion; debaſe our Minds, and faſten them down to the Earth, devour our time and ſtrength, and leave us no Leiſure, no Inclination, to follow that which is the great End of Living, the Glory of God, and the Salvation of our Souls. They harden us againſt the *Calls* of Grace, and indulge and feed thoſe very Luſts, which we are bound to kill and crucify. And therefore, ſince when God permits the One ſort of theſe cares, he does not abſolve us from the Other; Since he appoints

points us to Another State, and hath given us a double Care; to provide for our living hereafter, as well as here, but chiefly to provide how we may live hereafter; And, ſince that future Life is to be ſought, by fervent Devotion, by conſtant Watchfulneſs, by painful Labour of the mind, by many repeated Acts of Self-denial and Mortification; Since Vertue and Happineſs are not to be attained in an inſtant, but muſt be the fruit of a long Courſe and continual Endeavours; Since the Rewards of theſe are ſo much more precious and deſirable, and the Reſt at our Journeys end ſo much more comfortable, than any Conveniences we can poſſibly meet with by the Way; It follows, that theſe Conveniences muſt be uſed and ſought, but as Refreſhments only, as things given to ſupport and entertain us in our Travels. But if we be diverted by Theſe, and ſet up our reſt on this ſide the *Land of Promiſe*, The End of all will be to periſh in our folly; And when, inſtead of thanking Him by our Obedience, who gives us theſe Encouragements, we grow fond of Them, and deſpiſe Him; What can we think all this will come

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to at laſt, but that God ſhould be Juſt, and ſuch men Miſerable? That he revenge this baſeneſs of Wretches ſo inſenſible of their own true happineſs, ſo unthankful for his gracious Condeſcenſions in their favour. In a word, that the fooliſh Worldling, who rather choſe to feed on Husks with Swine, ſhould be ſhut out as unworthy to eat Bread *in the Kingdom of his Heavenly Father.*

II. *From the* Juſtice *of God in condemning, Wretches ſo unperſwadeable to their own Advantage,* I paſs now, in the *Second* place, *To conſider his* Mercy *in the means uſed for the Converſion of thoſe, who do thankfully accept and profit under them.* And This, as it is illuſtrated throughout the whole Parable, ſo particularly in the twenty third Verſe now before us, *The Lord ſaid unto the Servant, Go out into the Highways and Hedges, and compel them to come in, that my houſe may be filled.* That even the *Jews* ſhould find ſo much favour was wonderfully kind, but of That large Intimations and Promiſes had been given in the Old Teſtament. But that the *Gentiles* ſhould be admitted, who were under the ſame formal Cove-

Covenant with God; That the *Blind* and the *Lame*, the Wanderers and Stragglers ſhould be ſo earneſtly invited, ſo gladly received, this is a moſt ſurpriſing, a moſt unſpeakable Condeſcenſion. It was ſo in the firſt Eſtabliſhment of the Goſpel, it is ſo in the conſtant miniſtration of it ſtill. For, even in Chriſtian Countries, there want not inſtances too many, of Men, whoſe Spiritual Infirmities render them as diſtreſſed, as deſpicable in that Capacity, as their Outward and Bodily ones do thoſe wretched Objects, that lie at our Doors, and in our Streets. The Ignorant and the Irreſolute, the Men of Weak Reaſon and Strong Paſſions, Theſe are the *blind*, and the *halt*, and the *maimed*; And They who live wild, and ſubmit to no Rule, no Order, are as properly the *High-ways* and *Hedges*, as the darkeſt and moſt barbarous Nations heretofore. Yet even theſe our God does not deſpiſe, but gathers them up and feeds them, when they are duly ſenſible of their Miſery, humble and poor in Spirit, and ſadly ſorry for their Imperfections. Thus, while They, whoſe Hearts and Circumſtances are at Eaſe, grow inſolent,

ſent, and diſdain his Mercy, and theſe conceited rich are ſent empty away; The hungry Soul feeds, and fills it ſelf with good things. The Perſons then, to whom ſuch favour is ſhewn, make it the more remarkable; Eſpecially when ſo much Induſtry is uſed upon their account as this whole Parable reflects; And We, if we reflect upon the wiſe methods of God, may find.

Now this care I ſpeak of, was ſeen heretofore, in the many repeated Meſſages and Calls to *Knowledge and Repentance*; In God's being found of thoſe that ſought him not, and manifeſting himſelf to Them, who neither were, nor cared to be, acquainted with him. But chiefly in ſending that Eminent Servant, *Him in whom his Soul delighted*, Him, *who took upon him the form of a Servant*, and ſtoop'd to all the meanneſſes and ſufferings of Afflicted fleſh, to collect theſe miſerable and impotent Creatures into his Houſe, and unite theſe Vagabonds into one Family. Nor does there want great and wiſe Variety of Means to reduce lame and infirm Chriſtians ſtill; tho' neither the Caſe, nor the manner of the Remedy now, do either require, or admit,

admit, an exact Parallel. The receiving Men early into Chriſt's Fold, and preventing the Powers of Hell, and Misfortunes of Error, by the timely Sanctifications of Baptiſm, and Securities of being Educated in the Truth; The daily Adminiſtration of the Word and Sacraments, which are ſo many *Calls* loudly ſounding in our Ears; The Inward Influences of the Divine Grace, driving thoſe *Calls* home, and making them enter deep, and work Effectually; Theſe are ſtanding Methods; and with Theſe Applications all Ingenuous Tempers will be won. But if Some prove Refractory and Diſobedient, God does not give them over even ſo. For then is the Seaſon of *compelling them to come in*, that is, Of betaking himſelf to ſome more ſharp, and powerful, and awakening methods; Such as ſhall in a manner force and drive them to better Conſideration, ſuch as there is no ſtanding out againſt, but will work upon Men's minds, almoſt whether they will or no. Of this kind are thoſe Seaſonable Pains, or Fits of Sickneſs upon our Perſons; Thoſe Afflictions in our Eſtates, Thoſe Loſſes of our Relations, The Aſper-

Aſperſions upon our good Names, by which the Stubborn themſelves are bound to diſcipline, the Proud are humbled, the Careleſs are rouzed into Thought, and the Bold daring Sinner is affrighted into better manners. For the natural Effect of theſe things is to teach men Underſtanding, and the End of all Correction from our Heavenly Father, is to make the chaſtiſed parties *partakers of his holineſs*; to reclaim them from thoſe Offences that have deſerved his Judgments, and to bring forth the wholſome and *profitable fruits* of Peace, and Patience, and Amendment. * Hebr. XII. 10.

Oh Bleſt conſtraint! Oh kind ſeverity! Lord give us Grace, when this thy bitter Cup is held forth to us, not with Patience only, but even with Thanks to drink it; and wiſely to conſider, that what it wants in Reliſh, it makes up in Health and kindly Operation. Help us, not to bear only, but to kiſs the Rod; and bleſs thoſe Sufferings that force us to be happy. Lord! when thy Gentler methods have been uſed to no effect, permit us not to periſh for want of ſtrong unpalatable remedies; but when we wander and grow wanton with proſperity, ſtop thou our

wicked and unwary steps, pluck us back from the dangerous precipice, and let us not be utterly lost; but, by distresses and misfortunes sent for our Eternal welfare, bend our Head-strong Hearts, subdue and soften our rebellious Passions, and thus at least *compel us to come in.*

I shall take leave now to conclude this Argument concerning Mens neglect of Religion in general, by applying the Parable before us, as our excellent * Church hath done, (and as the common practice of many careless Christians gives but too just occasion for doing) to their making Business and Diversions an excuse, for not frequenting the Blessed Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in particular. This is a great and most necessary part of the Christian Institution; it is enforced by all those Reasons urged at large in the foregoing parts of this Discourse; But, because something may be observed with regard to it, more peculiar to the Dignity of the Mystery, and more accommodated to stir and warm our Affections, I would not content my self with referring you to those general Considerations only.

* *Comman. Service. Second Exhort.*

Consider

Consider then, my Brethren, that Your God and Saviour hath here prepared a noble and most delicious Feast. He spreads his Table, sends out his Servants and Inviters, and asks your Company to eat; to eat not only with him, but of him. Himself is here the Master, and himself is the Entertainment. The Fowls upon the Mountains, and the Beasts of the Field are all in his sight; yet were all these slain and served up, the Feast would not be so rich as now it is. For here the Soul is fed, and Heaven it self descends Mystically into every faithful Breast. The Lamb of God is kill'd and crucified: You see the Images of his Body bruised and broken, and the Blood streaming from his Wounded Side. And with these Elements of Bread and Wine each faithful Guest receives an inward Grace: Pardon & Peace, spiritual Strength and every benefit of his saving Passion. Hence 'tis these Elements are term'd the *Bread of Life*, the *Wine of Elect Souls*, and in a spiritual and efficacious sense, the *Flesh and Blood of Christ*, which nourishes and exhilarates the inward Man, and conveys into us a principle of living godlily, and living for ever.

And are you ſo ſtupid, to prefer the *Apples of Sodom*, and the *Grapes of Gomorrah*, before this Heavenly Banquet? Do the fading, the empty objects of the preſent time ſo wholly imploy you, that no leiſure can be found for the Concerns of Eternity? Shall ſinful Delights; nay, ſhall important Affairs draw you off? What is this, but to indulge your Bodies, or to feed your Families, while ſomething, nearer to you than both theſe, is ſuffered to lye and periſh for Hunger, without any ſeeming Concern?

But farther yet. Remember who it is that invites you. Your Father, your Friend, your King, your God. And is there no reſpect due to theſe Characters? It is your Chriſt that calls; he who hungered, and thirſted, and wept, and bled, and dy'd for you. He calls you to that health and happineſs, which you could never have had, unleſs he had in mercy condeſcended to do and ſuffer all this for you.

He earneſtly intreats you in this Sacrament to accept the pledges of his future, and the tokens of his paſt Love; to ſtrengthen your Faith in the One, by theſe lively remembrances

of

of the Other: And not refuſe to be found by one, who hath taken ſo much pains to ſeek and to ſave you, when you were loſt. How can you then ſo rudely, ſo unworthily abſent your ſelves? How unpardonable is this Coldneſs, this Refuſal, this Contempt of ſo great a Myſtery, and your own Mercy? Is this a ſuitable return for ſo much Kindneſs? And would you forgive your ſelves for uſing any Patron upon Earth ſo ungratefully? But you want no inclination, if Buſineſs and troubleſome Engagements would permit you to come. Alas! vain Man! Your *Fields and Yoke of Oxen*, the following your Employment, and providing for your Children will not diſcharge you from attending here. If theſe things ought to be done, yet the other ought leaſt of all to be left undone. Nor hath God ſo ordered the matter, but that Both may very well be done, and each, in their due place, will be highly acceptable to him. But if our neceſſities were truly conſidered, this is the much more neceſſary. For hither we come to find Cure for our Sins, Food for our inward Strength, Comfort for our Sorrows, a Sanctified uſe of our

Enjoyments, a Bleſſing upon our honeſt Labours, and, which is more worth than all the reſt, a Fore-taſt of Heavenly Bliſs, in peace of Conſcience, pure Devotion, and an intimate Union with our dear Redeemer. Theſe are the Benefits of worthy Communicating, and They who will conſent to be thus happy here, ſhall by theſe means be happy for ever hereafter.

Do not then turn the deaf Ear to ſo kind, ſo advantagious offers; nor let Gods empty Tables any more reproach you: Defraud not thus your Souls, whoſe dangerous Sickneſs is want of Appetite to this Spiritual Food. And that Inappetence is cauſed by too long abſtinence. Frequent and devout approaches will quicken your deſires, will heal your diſtempers, will refreſh all your Languiſhings. And, believe me, it highly concerns you, to make up for paſt neglects, while you have time: For fear theſe precious opportunities riſe up in Judgment, and draw on that Sentence of my Text, That *They who will not taſte this Supper here*, ſhall not be ſuffered to partake in Heaven, of That which this repreſents, even the Glorious Preſence of the King

of

of Saints, the Company of Angels and Bleſſed Spirits, the everlaſting Feſtival of the Faithful, and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb of God. Which Condemnation God give us all Grace to eſcape, *for the ſake of that Lamb, the bleſſed Holy Jeſus, who takes away the ſin of the World, and to whom, with God the Father, and the Holy Ghoſt be all Honour and Glory for ever.* Amen.

SERMON XII.

THE CASE OF A Weak and Imperfect FAITH.

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.

Lord I believe, help thou my Unbelief.

WHILE our *Saviour* was discovering his Glory to some of the Disciples, in his Transfiguration on the Mount; a Person, in grief for his *Son*, who was grievously vexed

vexed with a Devil, brings him to the remainder of those Disciples left behind, to have the evil Spirit dispossest. Providence in great Wisdom had so ordered the matter, that They were not able to effect this Cure, which gave occasion to the Scribes to attack them; And in the Heat of that Dispute our Saviour returns, * to inquire into the Cause of their Controversy; † and is answered by the Party concerned, that he had made Tryal of the Disciples in Vain; which gave him some distrust of their Master too. For so it is manifest it had, by that doubtful form, in which he begs his assistance, (*V.* 22.) *But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.* Our Saviour hereupon gives him to understand, that even the Power of working Miracles was under some confinements; and not to be exerted, except in favour of such Persons as met it with a ready Faith: But where it found Men duly qualify'd, nothing was or should be wanting on God's part; *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth,* (V. 23.) The Father of the Child, full of concern for his Son, sadly sensible of his own

*Vers. 1. to 14.
† Ver. 16.

own Defects, and desirous of greater perfection, replies with a very moving earnestness, and an over-flowing of Tears, *Lord I believe, help thou my unbelief.*

This manner of Address plainly speaks the State of the Man's Mind, and shews he wanted a full and absolute perswasion, and such an entire confidence in the Power and Goodness of Christ, as he wished and ought to have had: Nay such as we find several instances of, in the History of our Saviour's Life and Actions. But, though he had not all Faith, yet it seems he had Enough for his purpose. He did not come up to the highest, and foremost Rank; but he was accepted, and thought worthy of Compassion, though not of Commendation. Accordingly the following Verses declare the success of this imperfect condition of Soul; for our Lord commanded the dumb and deaf Spirit, and wrought the Cure, though with some pain and difficulty to the Patient. A difficulty which seems to have born proportion to the Father's Faith; For *the Spirit cried and rent him sore, and he was as one dead.* But however, the Command was too mighty to be disobey'd, for *the Spirit came out of him,*

* Ver. 26.

him, and as St. *Matthew adds*, in his relation of this Paſſage, *the Child was cured from that very Hour*..

My deſign from hence is to apply this inſtance at large, by enquiring into the nature of a Weak and Imperfect Faith, and that chiefly for theſe two Reaſons.

Firſt, For the Humiliation of thoſe who imagine themſelves more perfect than really they are.

And *Secondly*, for the Comfort of Them, who are in reality Better men than they imagine themſelves to be. And I do not doubt, before I have done, but to convince the moſt exalted Chriſtian, that though he may truly ſay, with this perſon in my Text, *Lord I believe*; yet there is need enough ſtill of joyning in the latter part of the Verſe, and of praying as he did, *Lord help my Unbelief*. And I hope too, that what I ſhall ſay will be able to ſupport the honeſt and the feeble-minded Chriſtians, that though they are ſadly ſenſible of *ſome remains of Unbelief* in their Souls, which need to be helped; yet the Caſe is not ſo bad with them neither, but that they may without Vanity make

that Profeſſion, in the beginning of my Text, and ſay very truly, *Lord I believe.*

This is my intention; but the nature of the Subject will not ſo well bear to have the Argument branched out to theſe Two different ſorts of Perſons diſtinctly. For the ſame Reaſons, which prove that No man arrives at an abſolute Perfection in Faith, do likewiſe prove, That No man ought to deſpair, becauſe he diſcovers ſome Imperfections of Faith in himſelf. Since at that rate Every ones Circumſtances would be deſperate; and there could be no ſuch thing as a worthy and true Believer in the World. I muſt therefore content my ſelf with handling this matter in the General; and that, which ſeems to me at preſent the beſt method for doing it effectually, is to inſiſt on theſe Three Heads.

I. Firſt, *To aſſign ſome reaſons for the weakneſs of mens Faith.* And theſe ſhall be ſuch, as every one of us will find himſelf more or leſs concerned in.

II. Secondly, *To ſhew, that thoſe things which Many People are apt to ſuſpect*

ſpect as ſigns of Unbelief, or that they have not True Faith, are not in reality any ſuch Signs. And

III. Thirdly, *To lay down ſome Rules, whereby the weakneſs of Faith may be diſtinguiſh'd from the Want of it.* And here I will ſhew how any man, by examining his own Conſcience carefully, may diſcern whether his Belief be conſiſtent with the Terms of Salvation, or not.

I begin with the 1*ſt*, And here by *Faith* I underſtand not only (1.) *The Aſſent of the mind* to thoſe Truths which God hath revealed, in obedience to his Command, and dependence on his Truth and Goodneſs; Nor barely (2.) *An outward and expreſs'd Profeſſion* of all ſuch Articles, are neceſſary to be acknowledged in order to make us Chriſtians; but alſo (3.) *Such a vigorous and lively Aſſent, as may prevail upon men to enter into Covenant with God, and may influence their Hearts and Practice powerfully,* ſuch as may put us upon the performance of our Duty, and the making good thoſe Engagements in the whole Courſe of our Lives, which we bring upon our ſelves, when we thus enter into

Covenant with God. For All This is comprehended under *Believing*; and several accounts may be given of our failing in sundry instances of this Faith. Particularly These that follow.

1. As *First*, One reason of this may be taken from the very *Nature of those things, which we are commanded to believe.* For Some of these being very dark and mysterious Truths, it cannot be expected, that our Minds should adhere to them, with the same sort of Assurance, that they are used to do, in such Other matters as fall within our Comprehension, and of which we have a clearer and more distinct knowledge. The Attributes and Excellencies of God; the Trinity of Persons in the Divine Nature; an Eternal State of Bliss or Woe hereafter; and the Restoring to us these fleshly Bodies again at the General Resurrection, (notwithstanding the infinite and unconceivable Changes which Time and Corruption bring upon them in the mean while) These, and some Others of the like nature are of the first Principles of Christianity; the Prime and most necessary Truths to be entertained, and firmly embraced.

embraced. But it is manifeſt withal, that Theſe are matters, of which one cannot have any juſt and adequate Notions: Becauſe they are not commenſurate to the Capacities of mortal men. The largeſt mind is too narrow to receive them; the moſt penetrating Wit cannot ſound all their depths; nor the moſt indefatigable Study conquer all the difficulties that may be charged upon them. And therefore, ſince Men's Aſſent is always governed by their Apprehenſions, the Mind will never find the ſame Evidence for thoſe things that are far above out of our ſight, that it does for Others, which we ſee, and feel, and daily converſe with; Such as are of the ſame level with our ſelves, and we are able to give a tolerable good account of, by our own ſerious Thought, and nice Enquiry into the Nature of them.

I do not mean by this, that we have not Sufficient Motives for our Belief, even of thoſe Truths, which we are leaſt able to comprehend. For, when we are once perſwaded of the Being of a God; and convinced, that theſe are His Revelations; nothing can be more equitable, than to ſubmit our own Rea-

Reasoning to his Declarations. This single Reflection, that infinite Wisdom cannot be mistaken, that Infinite Goodness cannot lead others into mistakes, nor perfect Truth lye, is a foundation strong enough to Build the firmest Faith upon. But still the urging of this Reflection upon our selves must be the work of much application. And, though we are exceedingly to blame, if any Objections, which the Obscurity of those Great Important Doctrins is wont to raise in us, be suffered to overthrow our Faith, or dangerously to shake it; yet such is the nature of our minds, that where Sense or Demonstration do not represent things to us plainly, and beyond all Contradiction, there Scruples and Cavils will now and then arise; and the Devil will not fail to make use of these Occasions, and try by them to loosen and dissettle us, from that firmness of perswasion, which is due to such a Revelation. Even They, who struggle most successfully against such attempts of his, may yet sometimes find a tendency to doubt, or some little disturbance from them.

But those men will be sure to find a very great deal, who, over-looking the Credibility

dibility of the Teſtimony and Revelation it ſelf, which is Reaſon's proper Province in theſe matters; they expect their ſatisfaction from the ſight and knowledge of the things Revealed. Which is in effect to put their Enquiry upon a *wrong* Scent, to require an Evidence, of which the Condition of this Subject is not capable, and to deſtroy the very Eſſence of Faith: which in ſtrict ſpeaking could not be *Faith*, if it were not the *Evidence of things unſeen.*

Now, if ſuch be the Condition of our Faith, with regard to the very firſt Act; That of *Aſſenting to the Truths revealed by God*: We ſhall find the Difficulties grow upon us in the following parts of it, when it comes to influence our Practice, and to govern our Affections. And this will appear very evidently, if we conſider

(2.) *Secondly*, After what manner it is, that the Belief of theſe Truths come to gain a power over our Wills, and to command our Actions. One would think, that, to be once throughly convinced of the Truth of Chriſtianity, and the Reaſonableneſs and Ex-

cellency of the Duties it enjoins, were enough to fix a Man all his Life long. And perhaps, in matters of mere Speculation it is so. After any point hath been duly considered, and all the Arguments for and against it have been put into the Balance together; That side which preponderates will take possession of the Understanding. And, if the advantage be visible and great, there will be no probable danger of having this undone again, or being drawn off to a contrary Opinion. But where we are not to rest in a bare Judgment, of a thing's being *thus*, or *otherwise*; Where we are obliged to pursue a Doctrine tho' all its Consequences, and to make it a Rule of Living to us; Where we must not only believe that so it is, but upon all occasions behave our selves like Men seriously possest with that belief; there the Case is very different. And from hence it is, that no present perswasion, though never so full and clear, will answer the Character of a Christian Faith, without a particular and constant Application. And in this it seems to be chiefly, that the generality of Christians fail: And great difficulties there are, both in reducing

General

General acknowledged Truths to our own Particular Circumstances; and in having the Applications always ready and at hand, when our occasions call for them.

This is manifestly seen in the very first principle of all Religion, *The Belief of a God and Providence*. For the acknowledgment of such a Being infers a Power constantly superintending the Affairs of the whole World; Ever present with us; A strict Observer, and an impartial Judge of all our Actions; A Lover of Holiness and Justice, and a mighty Avenger of his Honour, when we provoke him. These are all of them Notions, which either Nature, or Religion, or Both, have riveted so fast into men's Minds, that we find very Few of those who strive against them, and would fain get quit of them, able to do it effectually.

And yet of the Men who profess to have these Apprehensions, how few are there, that take a due care to drive them home, upon their Consciences, and improve them to all the mighty purposes, which they are fitted to serve? Nay; How often do even They, who revolve them frequently, and

make it their business to dwell and converse with their Lord; How often, I say, do They, the Best, the most Reverent Adorers of the Godhead, betray their want of Consideration, and fall, by Surprise or Forgetfulness, if not by Wilfulness and Presumption? Now the failings of most People in this Case, cannot proceed from Infidelity, or want of Faith, properly so called; for they do most firmly believe the Justice, and Providence of God; And are able, perhaps, in cold Blood, to convince the sturdiest Gainsayer, and to warm the coldest and most frozen Neglecter of Religion.

But the business is, that their thoughts are not always equally bent, nor the Applications of these general Doctrines at all times made to their own private Circumstances; Or even those Applications are not ever powerful alike: And, because the *shewing our Faith by our Works*, is a duty of continual practice and use; and not One single Act of Perswasion and Assent, though never so stedfast; Therefore every one, in this respect, is more or less defective, as he is wanting in the ready performance of each Act. And even those

who

who would be ready to dye at a ſtake for the Truth of Chriſtianity, yet cannot always preſerve their Minds ſo throughly awake, nor find the Impreſſions of theſe things ſo lively and vigorous, as to prevent, in their lives, every thing that is not perfectly conſiſtent with ſuch a Belief. The Habit of Faith is in their Souls; and in May, perhaps in Moſt Occaſions, exerts itſelf with great efficacy, and ſucceſs. But it is their misfortune, that the Cares of the World, The Clutter of buſineſs, The Diverſions of Life, Their own Inadvertency, or ſome other accidental Unhappineſs, juſtle the more neceſſary Meditations aſide for a while, and ſo that Habit lies dormant and idle. It will probably recover and rouſe it ſelf very quickly, but, till that be done, it is the ſame thing, (as to that particular inſtant of action) as if the man had had no ſuch *Ideas* at all.

3. But *Thirdly*, There is yet another Account to be given of Men's weakneſs of Faith, in which all of us are deeply; All (God knows) but too deeply concerned, I mean the Infirmities of Humane Nature, with regard

to the prevalency of our carnal Lusts, and the Affection we bear to this present World. The former Particular shewed us a defect owing to want of Consideration; but This goes farther, & discovers a failing even in Consideration it self. When we pretend to judge, and yet determine wrong; When we do remember our Duty, & think upon it, but think and remember without Success. And This is a failing of so much the more fatal consequence, because Persons of higher Perfection are Subject to it. For, that the Heedless and Heady should stumble and fall, can be no strange thing to us. But when the Cautious and Circumspect, They who are sensible of the Slippery way, and see their danger, and intend to avoid the Precipice, do yet slide into it; This must in all reason make us very apprehensive, and will warrant no Man in any vain suppossals of absolute Security and Perfection.

The Powers of Reason and Religion are given us, to check and controul the extravagance of our Desires; to calm and quiet our Passions; to comfort and sustain us in all our Disorders and Misfortunes. And indeed, if applied seasonably and impartially,

they

they are sufficient for this great Work; An excellent Remedy for all our Diseases, and a sure Support under the heaviest Calamities of humane Life. But yet this Remedy does not always prove effectual; because we do many times fail in the Use of it, and will not allow it to have its full force, and just operation upon our Hearts, but incline too much to the Objects of sense, and are carried away by too tender a Concern for the things of this present World.

We know well enough, that the Happiness of a Christian is not placed here below: And, when the precious Promises of the Gospel are duly considered; when a Life of Eternity, and uninterrupted Bliss is put into the Balance, against One, which we are sure can be but short, and find to be uneasy and vexatious at the best; We cannot but be satisfied, that the Apostle had reason, in advising Men, by His Example, to look not *at* * *the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things that are not seen, because they are Eternal.* And yet, when we have impress this Truth pretty well, (as we think) upon our Souls; it frequently,

* 2 Cor. IV. 18.

either forsakes us quite, when we come to the Encounter; or proves too feeble, when we have most occasion for it. The Byas of Sense draws us from our strait Course; Some trifling Advantage, some pleasing Gratification presents it self; and, though we pretend to argue, and debate the matter, yet it is too frequently but like a Corrupt Judge; All Arguments against inclination are lessened to the view; The Bribery upon our affections is too tempting to be withstood; and we prevail with our selves against Duty and sober Consideration, to swallow the Bait, though at the same time we cannot but know, that there is Death upon the Hook. This is the Case of those infinite Offences, which are not early reflected upon with Remorse, when past; but are even committed with Reluctancy, at the very moment of Compliance. And the great Cause, why our After-remembrances of these things are so bitter to us, is, that then the Charm is at an End. We behold the Sin as it really is, and view it coolly; Expectation had magnified it to our Eye before; And we saw every thing dou-

 ble,

ble, while drunk with Desire and Passion. But now that Disguise is off, we have recovered our Senses, and the thing is returned to its true proportions again. And thus we know, and perceive the Better, and yet choose and pursue the Worse: And the Conflict St. *Paul* seems to describe in the Unregenerate Person, happens sometimes to be the Infelicity of a very good one, for the main: * *The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward Man: But I see another Law in my Members, warring against the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of sin that is in my Members.*

* Romans VIII. v. 19. 22, 23.

The Condition is much the same with our Griefs, and our Fears, and our Troubles, as it is with our Pleasures, and Desires. For, when we see a Friend in Poverty or Affliction, How many are there, that can address themselves to his Circumstances, with great Dexterity and Strength of Reason? Tell him, that he must consider himself always under the disposal of a Wise, and Just, and Kind Providence, that *does not afflict willingly*, nor

take

take any *delight in grieving the Children of Men*, but makes these very Chastisements a mark of Fatherly Tenderness and Love, and never proceeds to use Severity, but for excellent purposes, and to our mighty Advantage: *That* All things will be *sure to work together* * *for Good to them that Love and Fear God*, and continue stedfast in their Duty; And that the † *light sufferings* of a *moment*, if meekly submitted to, and wisely improved, will work out *a far more exceeding and Eternal weight of Glory*. These, and such like Consolations are frequently inculcated with great Sincerity and Zeal. We utter them, not formally, and as Words of Course, but as the real Sense of our own Souls. We wonder to see so small effect of them; and are apt perhaps to make invidious Comparisons between our Selves and Others; as being fully perswaded, that these Considerations would not fail to soften any Accident, and compose Our Minds under the severest Tryals, that our Patience could possibly be called to. But alas! Providence often undeceives us in this vain Opinion. For, if the like Misfortunes come to touch Us too,

* Romans VIII. 28.

† 2 Cor. IV. 17.

all

all our former Wonder and Contempt ceaſes, and we preſently find our ſelves *to be but Men.* When a devouring Fire hath conſumed our Subſtance in a Moment, or the Anguiſh of Pain, and Bodily Diſeaſes, caſt us upon Beds of Languiſhing and Sorrow; Or if the Deſire of our Eyes be taken from us with a ſtroke; a tender Wife, a darling Child, or a Friend that is even as our own Soul, ſnatched out of our Arms; Nature then gets uppermoſt, and Paſſion makes head: We ſoon find a vaſt difference between talking like Philoſophers, and acting like them; and ſeem to take it ill, that our Friends ſhould think we ought to admit of ſuch cold Comforts, or put our grief under ſuch Reſtraints, as we condemned others for neglecting, in the very ſame, or perhaps (if truly conſidered) in a more deplorable Caſe before, than Ours is now: I ſay, *if truly conſidered*, Becauſe in all theſe Caſes the Fallacy of *Self* leads us into groſs miſtakes, and is the only ground of all this change in us. For every Man is ſo partial, or ſo cruel to himſelf, as to fancy or find out ſome peculiar aggravations in his Own Misfortunes, which

which those of No other Persons in the World besides, (he thinks) are, or can be attended with. And All this for no manner of Reason, but because These are his Own, and Those are other Peoples. 'Tis the having no concern nor Interest in them, that shews him the Disasters of his Neighbours in a just light, and leaves his Mind free and undisturbed, to discern the suitableness of proper comforts to them. But in those that come home to himself, Interest, and Passion, and Self-Love turn the Glass, and shew him every thing through false Opticks. The Affliction swells to a monstrous bulk, and the Comforts dwindle away to nothing; till the black Cloud and Tempest be a little laid within; and the Man restored to Temper, and the power of thinking by Degrees.

Religion and Prudence do indeed assist Men wonderfully, in giving Law to their Passions, restraining their Excesses, and preserving them from all such furious Heats, as are impious and indecent. But they do not extinguish Humane Nature, nor prevent many sudden Sallies, which a good Man in his soberer thoughts may see

reason

reaſon enough to condemn in himſelf. It is * *Faith* indeed, which *overcometh the World*; and *This is the* only *Victory* we can obtain over it. But it is very well, if we gain the Field at laſt, though after many fruitleſs Attempts, and with ſome Loſs. For, while we continue to live in theſe Bodies, They, and their Concerns, will affect us very tenderly; We muſt be content, not only to act in them, but by them, and with them; nay, and to be acted upon by them too. And, unleſs Good men could wholly put off this load of Fleſh, and refine themſelves into Spirit, That will be dragging down the Soul, and tainting it, in ſome meaſure, with its Affections. And Good men muſt either ceaſe to be Men, or it will never be otherwiſe with them.

* 1 John V. 4.

Thus far then we have advanced in the deſign I at firſt propounded; that Theſe Reaſons, aſſigned for the weakneſs of Faith, concern Every Man; As being founded partly in the Nature of Religion, and partly in the Conſtitution of Mankind. And therefore, Since no Man's Underſtanding is ſo exalted, but that the Myſteries of Chriſtianity

ſtianity will ſtill be too high, and too vaſt for him to take a full view of; Since the Mind will not bear to be continually intent, and leaſt of all upon Spiritual and Divine Subjects; and even the moſt vigilant Man muſt have his Seaſons of ſlumbring; Since, *Laſtly*, The Corruptions of Senſe, and the Violences of Paſſion, and the Fondneſs for the World, will ever carry ſome ſway in a Creature, compounded of Body, as well as Soul; Since Senſual Allurements will entice ſometimes, and outward Diſtreſſes ſometimes ruffle and diſtemper the beſt diſpoſed Minds; The Defects of Faith in us all are but too manifeſt; and the moſt ſtedfaſt Believer, does not diſparage his Virtue, or injure his own Merit; if, to that profeſſion of the Perſon in my Text, *Lord I believe*, he condeſcend to add his Prayer too, and ſay, *Lord help my unbelief.*

II. The other part of my Undertaking is to ſatisfy the Perſons dejected in Spirit, beyond what there is juſt occaſion for; Such as, becauſe they with grief diſcover ſome failing and weakneſs of Faith, are apt pre-

ſently

ſently to ſuſpect that it is wholly wanting, and imagine it would be a preſumption, in ſuch as they are, to ſay *Lord I believe.*

And in that Subject too we have gained this Advantage too by what hath been ſaid already, That it is not every ſort of Doubting or Diſpute with a Man's ſelf about the Principles of Religion; Not every Slip and falſe Step made through Surpriſe, or Forgetfulneſs, or Inconſideration; Not every compliance with a Temptation, nor every Regret and Diſorder upon the Account of Afflictions, when they are ſent upon us; that muſt go for an Argument of our being in a State of Infidelity. Some Inſtances indeed there may be under each of theſe kinds, that greatly endanger a Man's Salvation, and are juſt matter of Diſcomfort to him; But others are ſuch, as he may lye under, and yet his Soul be ſtill in a very ſafe and good Condition. But the diſtinguiſhing between theſe more preciſely, and directing how to judge of our ſelves and Them, you muſt wait for a little longer; That being reſerved

ved for the Business of my *Third* particular.

In the mean while I observe, that nothing is more plain in Scripture, than these two Truths, (1.) That several Men may have True Faith, and each of them have it in different proportions: And also, (2.) That One and the same Man may believe truly, and yet believe at one time more stedfastly than at another. Which observations are both of them True in all the Cases, and the several instances of Faith before-mentioned; Whether we respect it only as an *Assent* of the Mind, or whether as a Principle of Virtue, and well-doing, I will explain my self by some Passages to be met with in the New Testament.

* Joh. IV. v. 39. 41, 42. *The Men of *Samaria* in the *Fourth* of St. *John*, believed our Saviour upon the Report of the Woman, that came from him; but they believed him yet more, when They heard his own Words.

† John IV. v. 50. 53. † The Ruler, in the close of that Chapter, believed, when our Lord said unto him, *Thy Son liveth*; But when he returned Home, upon comparing the time of his Recove-

ſon's Recovery, with that of our Lord's declaring it, he found an exact agreement between his words and the Event; Which was a great Addition, and a freſh Confirmation to his Faith.

* The Diſciples beg of our Lord, *that he would increaſe their Faith*, which he reſembles to a grain of Muſtard-ſeed; and, though the growth of this be ſo prodigious, that from the leaſt of Seeds, it ſpreads into a large Tree, yet ſtill it is Faith, when it is but as a ſingle Grain. Chriſt applies to himſelf, and to his gracious dealings with Weak Men, that Prophecy, of *not breaking the bruiſed Reed, nor quenching the ſmoaking Flax*, and thereby plainly intimates, that the Reed is ſtill ſuch though bruiſed, and that there is real fire in the flax, though it do not flame out in ſo bright a Zeal as that of Others, or as it ſelf hereafter will do. ‖St. *Peter* commands, that we *add to our Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Temperance*; and ſo on; And the more of theſe we add, the nobler our Faith is; But ſtill Faith it is, tho' we have not yet aſcended all that Scale of Heavenly Graces. And thus in reaſon we muſt conclude it to be. For Faith is a

* Luke XVII. v. 5, 6.

† Mat. XII. v. 20.

‖ 2 Pet. I. v. 5

Habit of the Mind, and, as such, it must needs admit of Degrees, and is capable of being greater or less, without changing its Nature, or ceasing to be Faith. The growth of the Soul is like that of the Body, gentle and slow, owing to long time, and much nourishment, and repeated exercise; So that, As the Humane Nature is the same in a Child of a Span long, tho' in less proportions then, as to every part of it; Faith is likewise the same in those whom the Scripture calls
1 Pet. II. 2. *Babes in Christ*; But stronger indeed
Eph. IV. 13. in them that *grow up to the fulness of the Stature of perfect men* in him.

This is so evident to Reason and Experience, that I should think it needless to insist any longer on my Second Head, were it not, that many well-meaning Persons are used to disquiet themselves with some very troublesome Scruples concerning this Matter. Some of the Chief whereof I shall therefore set my self to consider; and, if I can, to silence and satisfy them, in my next Discourse.

SER MON

SERMON XIII.

THE CASE OF A Weak and Imperfect *FAITH*.

The Scruples about it consider'd.

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.

Lord I believe, help thou my Unbelief.

THE Method in which I propos'd to treat of these Words, for the Humiliation of Men better in their own Opinion, than really they

are; and the Comfort of Others in reality, better than they think themselves to be; you may remember, was This:

First, To assign some Reasons for the Weakness and Imperfection of Faith; and These, such as every Man will find himself more or less concerned in.

Secondly, To shew, That those things which many people are apt to suspect in themselves, as Signs of Unbelief, or that they have no true Faith, are not in reality any such Signs.

Thirdly, To lay down some Rules, whereby the Want of true Faith may be distinguished from the Weakness of it; And how any Person, by examining his own Conscience, may discern, whether his Belief be consistent with the Terms of Salvation or not.

The *First* of these Heads hath been already dispatched; and some progress made in the *Second*; So far, as to shew, that Faith, like all other Graces, admits of several degrees, and that the Imperfection is no sure proof of the total and absolute Want of it.

But now, because Many People of honest Desires, and sincere Inclinations to

to Godliness, are sometimes involved in many uncomfortable Scruples upon this occasion, I promised farther to consider some of the principal Doubts, which used to give such Men trouble. And to that I now proceed.

These Discomforts, (so far as I have had occasion to observe them) usually arise, either (1.) From some Failings which Men feel or fancy in themselves, or (2.) From the Want of such easy and peaceful Resentments of Mind, as true Faith, and a Piety which God accepts, is always supposed to produce. I shall briefly consider each of these sorts, so far as is necessary to do it.

First, As to the Failings Men find or fancy in themselves, they are commonly such as these; *The falling now and then into some grievous Sin*; *The seeming decay of Grace*, and this is gathered from their not perceiving themselves to grow in it. *Their being not always so well disposed to Religious Duties*, or *so zealous in the performance of them, as they used and ought to be*; Not *Sorrowing enough for past Offences*; Or *coming short of*

ſome Virtues which they would fain attain to. I think Theſe are either the chief Objections, that Men uſe to urge againſt themſelves; Or at leaſt, that the Reſt may eaſily be reduced within this compaſs, and will admit of the ſame Anſwers with theſe. In which I ſhall not need to enlarge very much, becauſe what I have already diſcourſed concerning the general Cauſes of Weakneſs of Faith; and the Reality even of that Faith which is but Weak, does in a great meaſure contain the Subſtance of what is requiſite to be ſaid upon theſe ſeveral occaſions.

Now *Firſt*, The *falling back into old ſins*, is indeed a very ſad Conſideration, and ſo much the more ſo, as thoſe falls are more frequent, and the Sins into which we fall are more heinous. But, when we have remembred withal, that the moſt vigilant mind is not always awake; that the Impreſſions of Faith, and Zeal for Religion, are not always enforced to the utmoſt, nor will the Nature of Man bear perpetual Application, and intenſe Thought; Though this unhappineſs may well be allowed to create us ſome diſſatiſ-

diſſatisfaction, yet is it not of ſo evil Conſequence, as to miniſter any juſt occaſion of Diſtruſt, or abſolute Deſpair. For ſtill we have this Conſideration to ſupport us, That the great Judge of all the Earth will not fail to do Right; *that*, when He brings us to Account, all fair and reaſonable Allowances will be made, both for the weak and blind ſides of the Nature he hath given us, the ſurpriſes and ſudden Accidents which prevail upon our impotence, and enſnare us before we have leiſure to make head againſt them; the Intanglements of the World, and the vaſt variety of Temptations, that hem us in; and the ſtrength of ſenſual Appetite, which wearies out the Soul, in our continual ſtruggles with it. Theſe are ſuch misfortunes as every Man's Condition lays him open to: And from hence it comes to paſs, that the Virtue even of the moſt perfect is not without its Blemiſhes; That Repentance is the conſtant Buſineſs of Life; For, though a total change ſhould be made once for all; yet They, who purpoſe moſt, and proſecute their good Intentions beſt, will every day diſcover ſomething that had better not have been

done, or at leaſt ſomething that might have been done better. Something that either needs to be corrected, or is capable of being improved. And indeed the moſt cautious walker with God does not always order his goings, not only ſo, as to prevent falſe Steps, and ſmall Errors; but now and then wanders very far, and ſtumbles, and falls very dangerouſly.

To this very purpoſe is it, that (our Bl. Saviour excepted, who was God as well as Man) the Holy Scripture hath no where propoſed any Perſon whatever, as an eminent pattern of Virtue, without taking particular notice of ſome very remarkable Fault or other in that Man's Converſation. And ſurely the Anger and Impatience of *Moſes*, the Adultery and Murder committed by *David*, and the Denial of Chriſt by St. *Peter*, were not only intended to humble thoſe, who are ſo far tranſported with an Opinion of their own Excellencies, as to think they cannot fall; But alſo to raiſe and ſtrengthen them that do fall: For theſe prove, that there is a wide difference between a Mans doing things things unworthy of Religion, and wholly abandoning all the

the Principles of it: Between forgetting God for a Seaſon, and totally denying or departing from him altogether; And, that He is often provoked to be very angry with thoſe, whom yet he ſees fit to Compaſſionate, and not caſt off utterly.

The plain Truth of this Matter is; Humane Nature ſtands upon ſo ſlippery Ground, is thruſt at ſo ſore, and ſo fatally prone to ſtrike in with the Enemies and Temptations that ſeek its Ruine, that it may well exerciſe our wonder, how Men preſerve themſelves ſo often, and recover ſo ſucceſsfully; but, that the Beſt ſhould ſometimes fall, and need ſuch Recoveries, cannot to any conſidering Man appear ſtrange at all. Again,

Secondly, Some there are, who, though they cannot accuſe themſelves of any notorious Relapſes, (ſuch as thoſe we laſt mentitioned) yet queſtion the truth of their Faith, becauſe *they do not perceive themſelves to grow in it, nor do they find their Souls at all times ſo well diſpoſed to the Duties of Religon, or ſo zealous in the performance of them, as they deſire and ought to be*; and therefore what

what they see stand still, or at least imagine to do so, they conclude goes backward: That the Fruits of the Spirit are blasted, which do not apparently thrive, and approach to visible maturity: And that their Graces are quite extinct, because they do not always burn bright, and shine out with a clear flame.

Now in Answer to any dissatisfactions of this kind, we are to consider, that These are very false measures to take an Estimate of our selves by; and that our Graces are not always to be judged according to their visible increase; And that for these Two very good Reasons, *First*, *Because such Increases are not always necessary to our Safety*; And then *Secondly*, *Because indeed they are not always visible to us, even when they are actually made.*

I. *First*, I say *such Increases are not always necessary to our Safety.* In the Products of Nature, we know, there is a set proportion, beyond which, if any thing grow, All afterwards is exorbitant and rather Excrescence, and Deformity, than any just Perfection. This indeed cannot be said in the case of

of our Souls; for no man can be too Virtuous, or too excellently Good. But then it is as true, That the ſame pitch of Spiritual Strength and Grace, is no more requiſite to make all Perſons true Chriſtians, and true Believers; than the ſame Tallneſs of Stature, and Largeneſs of Limbs are required in every one to make him a true Man. And therefore, when our Saviour promiſes his aſſiſtance, it is only thus, that *his* * *Grace ſhall be ſufficient for us*, That is, we ſhall have all neceſſary Supplies. But it is very certain, that the Neceſſities of Men differ, according to their ſeveral Circumſtances and Capacities in the World, and as Theſe change, ſo their occaſions change alſo. Now from hence it will follow, both, that what is ſufficient for One Man, is not ſo for Another; And likewiſe, that what is ſufficient for the ſame Perſon at One time, may not Anſwer his Exigencies, nor ſuffice for his purpoſe at Another time. In a Poſt of Eminence, and Authority, where a Man's Office obliges him to inſtruct, or govern others, a larger ſhare of Wiſdom, and Prudence, and Piety is needful, to arm ſuch a one againſt the

*2 Cor. XII. 9.

hazards

hazards of a Publick employment, and enable him to lead and to warn others, by becoming *a burning and ſhining Light* in his Generation, and inſpiring his Charge by a pious Example.

And, even in the moſt private Station, as Temptations and Tryals aſſault a Man, ſo there is more preſſing want of Faith; And of a greater ſteadineſs and abundance ſtill, the thicker thoſe Darts of the Wicked are ſhot againſt us, and the more furious and fiery they are, which this Faith alone can quench. The Wiſdom of Governours does not think the ſame preparations neceſſary in time of Peace, as when actually in a State of War; But provides againſt Surpriſes, and is content to defer the Arming, or drawing out their Forces, till Action calls for them. And thus it is ſufficient, to be aſſured, that, upon great Emergencies, God's Strength ſhall be always ready at hand, and *made perfect in our weakneſs*, provided we be diligent and honeſt; that is, if we uſe the Strength we have, and do not indulge, nor induſtriouſly contribute to, our own Weakneſs. Let it be allowed then,

that

that a Man is not deceived in these Apprehensions of himself; And, that his Faith do not make any considerable Advance; yet if his Condition be such as does not call for any extraordinary Additions, the Case is still well enough. For, as no Man hath need to call his Health in question, who feels no indisposition of Body, though he do not perceive himself to grow every day stronger; So, if our Faith be but a preservative from Lapses and Errors, and secure us against Spiritual Sickness and Death; if we do not Languish and become manifestly cold and feeble in God's Service, nor find our Souls infected with Sin and Lust, This is a good Argument that our Spiritual Health is good. And, though a greater Degree, and higher perfections may be Desirable perhaps, yet still they are not Necessary, nor shall we perish for the want of them. Besides, where all these Blessings depend upon the mere Bounty and free Gift of our Master, we ought not to disquiet our selves with Reflections upon what we have not, but rejoyce and be thankful for what we have. It is enough, that we are admitted into his Fa-

Favour, that he snatches us from Ruine, and allows us any place at all in his presence; and will much better become us to sit down pleased, and take the lowest Room, than to discontent our selves, and lose the comfort of what we Enjoy, by repining that we are not taken *to sit on his right hand, and on his left, in his Kingdom.*

2. But then we are to consider in the next place, that *our Faith and other Graces do very often increase, and we in the mean while perceive it not.* What our Church in one of her Articles teaches us to confess, is most certain, That *Good Works do naturally flow from Faith, so that by them a true Faith may be known, as evidently as a Tree by its Fruit.* The meaning whereof is this, that what we call *Faith*, if it produce no good Deeds, is no better than Dead, and none at all. But it is by no means a just Consequence from hence, that no Faith is lively and true, which is not perpetually exerting it self in New instances, any more, than that the Tree is Dead, which is not always Green, and always bearing. For our Souls have, in some sense, their

Acts XII.

Winters

Winters too, and the Seasons of sprouting again into Verdancy, and Fruitfulness. If therefore, either want of Opportunities to shew it self, keep it hid; or the Storms of Affliction suppress, and put it back for a while; we have no reason to be discouraged, or despair of its Life; But may conclude, that, as the Corn lies covered, and yet gathers Strength when under Ground; so this Faith may grow and flourish, and fit it self for great and glorious undertakings, even when we have no visible signs, nor sensible proofs of its doing so. And such indeed is the nature of all Habits whatsoever, whose Excellency consists, not in perpetual Action, but in a Readiness and masterly Disposition to act as becomes them, so often only, as proper occasions are offered to exercise them.

Nay farther yet, I add, that, though some things should appear to us, which look very suspicious, and seem to argue great Decays at least, if not absolute Deadness of Faith; such as the being *sometimes indisposed to the Duties of Religion*, and feeling our Zeal less warm and vigorous than formerly,

merly, yet are not these Symptoms of so fatal Consequence, that we should conclude against the Reality of our Faith, or at all despair of our Spiritual Health and Safety from them.

Were the Soul indeed single by it self, and in a Condition to exert its own Powers, without any Lett or Contradiction, then we might expect, that it should be steddy and uniform in all its Operations. But here the Wise-Man's Observation takes place, That * *the corruptible body presseth down the Soul, and the Earthly tabernacle weigheth down the Mind, that museth upon many things*; or as the word might properly enough be render'd, *the mind encumbred with many cares.* And This in truth is Our Case. We are Subject to all the Necessities, and detain'd by all the Clogs and Hindrances, of a Body. Exposed to all the Trouble of supplying its Wants; and by that means, to all the Uncertainties, and all the Anxieties of the World; subject to all its Disorders and Infirmities; forced to act by, as well as with it, and so liable to be obstructed and diverted by its Passions and

* Wisd. IX. 15. πολυφρονίδα.

and Pleasures, its Pains, and its Diseases. This is the very Reason, Not only why One Man differs so vastly from Another; but why the Same Man differs sometimes so strangely from Himself, that he scarce appears to be the Same. And, since the very same Affections are the Springs of our Actions and Resentments in Religious Matters, which are in all Other Affairs; it must needs follow, that, as those Springs are differently set, and we differently moved by them, the alterations we feel in point of Duty and Devotion, as they belong to the same Causes, so they will vary in like proportions, as in our common and worldly Concerns. So that, as we have differing Constitutions given us at first, or as any Accidents afterwards change those we have; it ought not to seem strange, much less to create us any great Trouble or Disquiet, if the Temper of our Minds, and our Dispositions to God and Goodness, shall happen to vary accordingly. The Cold and Phlegmatick will not find all those sprightly Emotions of Heart, as the Sanguine and Airy Man; Nor will This Man again feel the same Depth of Godly Sorrow

and ſad Remorſe, nor the like complacency in the Auſterities and Mortifications of a penitent State, with one of a blacker and more heavy Blood. Thus Fear, and Love of God, and a ſtedfaſt Affiance in him, and Charity and Kindneſs to one another, though they be general Duties, ſuch as All are obliged to, and may arrive at a competent Degree of; yet All will not find it equally eaſy to practice them. But Thoſe Perſons will attain to the higheſt Perfections in theſe Virtues, and exerciſe them with leſs Difficulty, and a more ſenſible Delight, whom their own natural Complexions have moſt diſpoſed toward Each of them. For Every one hath not the ſame Proneneſs in himſelf to fear, or to love, to truſt, or to deſpond, to be good-natured, or to be ſordid. And therefore, As the Work muſt needs be double, where Nature muſt be oppoſed and over-ruled; ſo no doubt it is half done to our hands, where we are already poſſeſt with theſe happy Tendencies, when Inclination goes before, and directs us in our way to Duty.

Now

Now what Nature does once for all in forming our Conſtitutions at firſt, The Accidents of this Life, the Diſtempers of our Bodies, and a thouſand other Occaſional Things do for a time with us. That is, They give a preſent turn to our minds; and, while theſe Impreſſions laſt upon us, inſpire our Souls with ſtronger inclinations and averſions than uſual, and diſpoſe or indiſpoſe us more, than, in our ſelves, and according to our general Temper, we are wont to be, toward them.

The Sobereſt and moſt Conſiderate Perſon cannot always preſerve ſuch an Evenneſs of Spirit, that no Provocation, no ſudden Guſts of Anger, or Grief or ſome other Paſſion, ſhould not ſometimes render his Thoughts tumultuous and diſorderly. Thoſe that *ſeek the Kingdom of God and his Righteouſneſs firſt*, yet muſt allow ſome part of their time and pains, in an honeſt ſearch of the leſs important Conveniencies of this Life; And Buſineſs and Care, though they be ſo well guarded as not to diſſettle, yet they will in ſome meaſure divert the mind from the *One thing* neceſſary. A Man thus incumbred, cannot return

from the World to God all on the ſudden, with the ſame fixed and ſedate Compoſure of Mind, as if no other thoughts had mingled themſelves with his Religious ones. But eſpecially; The Soul and Body are linked together in ſo cloſe a band, their operations upon one another reciprocally are ſo very quick and powerful, that it is ſcarce to be conceived, how ſtrangely they labour under one anothers infirmities: And how great and ſpeedy a change the Soul and all its affections feel, by every little Alteration that happens to the Body. How the Mind exults and enlarges it ſelf, when This is in good health and temper; and again, how it languiſhes, and is cramped up under every indiſpoſition, every accidental diſturbance, that ſhakes the fleſhly Tabernacle, in which it dwells. How Age and Sickneſs do not only waſte our Strength, and wither our Limbs, but enervate our Minds too, enfeeble all their Operations, and, as it were disjoynt all their Powers. How mighty a ſtroke all theſe things carry, and what Changes they make in us, Every one, who does at all conſider, and look into himſelf, will quickly find,

None

None of us is able at all times alike to maintain the same Easiness of Humour, and Freedom in common Conversation. None is always equally qualified to think, or bend his mind to business; but even our Understandings have their Lucid, and their Clouded intervals. And if That part of our Mind, which hath least of all to do with the Body, be yet affected with the several Habits of it; How much more must those Others, (the Will, and the Desires) be subject to them, whose business lies chiefly with those Appetites and Inclinations, which Flesh and Sense converse with, and are moved by? How strongly must These determine us in Acts of Piety and Devotion particularly; and inspire Warmth, or chill us with Cold, when those Affections are the very part chiefly employed? All which is the more necessary to be observed, that Men may be set right in their judgments of themselves; and not rashly pronounce, as they frequently do, concerning the State of their Souls, and the hopes of Eternal Salvation, from such things as are not of a Spiritual Relation, but proceed merely from Natural and Necessary Causes. For

Thus in effect it is, that the *Incomes* and *Desertions* which Some people affect to talk of so much, and lay such mighty stress upon, are neither the Graces, nor the Defects of their mind, so much as the present Habit of the Blood and Spirits, and the particular Temper and Constitution of their Bodies.

III. The *Next* Objection seems to carry much more reason of Dissatisfaction, which is, when Men apprehend, that *they are not sufficiently sorry for their past Sins.* For This is a most necessary Duty; and He that does not sorrow enough, does it to very little purpose. But here again the whole Difficulty lies, in determining *what is Enough.* The misfortune of Persons in their Doubts concerning Remorse for sin is, that they mistake the Nature of Sorrow upon these Occasions. It is supposed by many, that this Sorrow does of it self recommend us to God, and is, for its own sake, exceeding acceptable to him; That herein chiefly consists the Repentance of a Sinner; As appears (they tell you) from the mournful Complaints of *David*, the bitter Weeping of St. *Peter*, and Other instances

inſtances of Holy Penitents in Scripture. All which are our Patterns, and, when we fall ſhort of Their Anguiſh and Grief of Heart, it is to be feared, that we want Their Faith and Their Sincerity. And therefore it is urged, that no Man's Soul ought to ſpeak comfort to him, without the like Humiliations, the like inward perplexities and groanings of Spirit, the like *watering our Couch with Tears*, and *making our Bed to ſwim in the Night-Seaſon*.

Now all this is owing, as I ſaid, to a wrong apprehenſion of this Godly Sorrow, and not diſtinguiſhing between the End it is to promote, and the Sorrow it ſelf which is but as the Mean, and Way to that End. St. *Paul* hath taught us, * *that this worketh repentance not to be repented of*; But that which worketh Repentance, is plainly a part, or an Inſtrument, or a Cauſe of it only, but cannot be the Whole, nor the Perfection of the thing it works. Repentance is the Change of Heart and Life, the coming to a better Senſe, and acting more wiſely for the time to come. Where this is done effectually, God accepts the Perſon, let the degree of Sorrow that brought him to it, have been what it will.

* 2 Cor. VII. 10.

And where this is not done, no proportion of Sorrow is pleasing in his sight. Our Good is the thing he desires. He delights in the change of our Manners, and the correcting of our Wills; and no Affliction or Sadness of Heart can give pleasure to a Being so infinitely Kind as God, (who is Love and Goodness in its utmost Perfection) any farther, than those Dejections of mind contribute to our substantial Holiness, and thorough Reformation.

It is highly expedient indeed, that we should be most heartily concerned for having done amiss, because what we are truly sorry for we shall not easily be induced to repeat, or suffer our selves to be reconciled to any more. And such a Concern will be the natural result of a serious Reflection, how we dishonour God and our selves by a wicked Life; what Vengeance we have provoked, and what Mercies we have abused. But, since all our Indignation, and Shame, and Zeal, and Detestation of our former Offences, tends only to the hating and forsaking them effectually; the Sincerity of these depends upon the effect they

they have upon our future Behaviour. And, as every ſorrowful Man is not truly penitent, ſo many true penitents make no very great appearances of Sorrow. And it is not the Tears, or the Sighs, or the Melancholy Bewailings of our Miſery, but the After-Acts of our Lives, from whence we muſt take the true meaſures and marks of Repentance.

All other Teſtimonies are exceeding deceitful, and ſuch as no man can with any good aſſurance depend upon. For, beſides that nothing ſhort of ſerious Amendment, the cleanſing of the Hands, and purifying the Heart anſwers the deſign of our Contrition; there is ſo great a variety of Tempers among Men, that no ſure Concluſion can be made from One Man to Another. Some are ſo tender and ſoft, that the ſlighteſt occaſions ſuffice to melt them into tears: And Others ſo tough and impenetrable, that they can entertain the ſevereſt Accidents, without any appearance of Concern. Some again quickly compoſe and recover themſelves, and when once their Grief hath gotten a vent, it is preſently forgotten again; and they are the ſame gay

Perſons

Persons, as if no Evil had happened to them. Others Affliction takes absolute possession of, no time will wear it off, No comforts will appease their troubled Spirits. So that no fixed proportion of Grief can be so accommodated, as to fit the Circumstances of such distant Constitutions. The Rule then in common to both sorts, is the efficacy of those Impressions: Which, whether their Violence, or their Continuance be more or less, is only then of equal force and value in Both, when Both are alike reformed by them, alike prevailed upon to commit no more those Follies, which have been the just cause of so much Disquiet to their Minds.

The Lamentations indeed of those famous Penitents in Scripture do much surpass the Usual Proportions of most Christian's Grief, so far as we are able to guess. And it was fit, that They who had given such instances of Humane Frailty, in falling so grievously, should be as remarkable Patterns of holy Indignation and Zeal, in acknowledging their Faults, and recovering themselves from them. This was highly commendable In them, and is thus far

far an inſtruction to Us, that We ought to afflict our ſelves with ſad remembrances, in proportion to the Delight, and the Aggravations, with which we offended. But that is, becauſe this After-puniſhment, inflicted by our own hands, will encreaſe our Hatred againſt Sin. A Hatred, that can never be too great; and therefore no Sorrow that contributes to it, can be too great neither, provided we find it neceſſary for the reclaiming us more perfectly, and that it do not drive us to Deſpair, or Diſtruſt of God's Mercy, nor rob us of thoſe ſweet Comforts, pronounced to Holy Mourners, and which the Service of God, and a good Conſcience, are deſigned to ſupport, and cheer us with.

But of This great Care muſt be taken, and a prudent Temper uſed, like that practiſed by St. *Paul*, to the notorious offender at *Corinth*; Whom, though he had delivered to Satan for the Scandal of his Crime, yet upon his relenting he immediately reſtores,* *leſt Satan* (ſays he) *ſhould take an advantage over it, and the Man be ſwallowed up with over-much ſorrow.* From whence it is plain, both that there may be a dan-

* 2 Cor. II. 7. 11.

dangerous excess given of Penitential Sorrow, and that so much of it as brings us to be duly sensible of our Sins, and diligent to avoid and make amends for them hereafter, is sufficient for our purpose, and pleases God very well. So that No Man need torment himself with a Scruple of not sorrowing for his Sins as he ought, provided he have but effectually subdued and reformed them. For we grieve only, that we may hate and forsake them; and therefore we ought to assure our selves, that God, who regards our Virtue, will accept it by what means soever it be wrought. That, if the Cure be made, it is the same thing, whether the Remedies that effected it, were Corrosives or Lenitives. And sure we ought rather to be thankful, that God had Compassion on our Infirmities, and spared us from absolute Dejection, and used his gentler methods of healing; since he measures our Repentance, not by the quantity of our Tears, or the bitterness of our Complaints, but by the Sincerity of our Hearts, and the amendment of our Lives, for the time to come.

And

And now, as to the *Falling short of some Vertues*, which was the *Last* of those Failings before-mentioned, from whence Men are used to doubt of their having True Faith; We ought not to be disquieted at This neither, except these be such Virtues, as are absolutely necessary for us to excel in, and our own endeavours be wanting to obtain them. Every Condition and Relation of humane Life brings its peculiar Duties and Obligations along with it. And Others, except those which are General, and Concern every Man in Order to Salvation, do not fall within the Compass of our present practice. But even of Those that do, we are no where promised, that we shall presently attain them, upon our designing to do so. God sees fit many times to leave a Lust unsubdued, and to withhold the Perfection of some Grace from us, thereby to keep us in Action, and to continue us Humble. Constant Success, in Spiritual as well as Temporal Affairs, is apt to blow us up with Pride, and make us not only Vain, but Idle and Careless too. And therefore, both our Modesty and our Dili-

Diligence ſtand in need of Difficulties, and Wants, and Diſappointments to preſerve them. So that the miſſing of One Virtue in this Caſe, often prevents the loſs of Another. The Check of what we Deſire, procures the Advance of ſomewhat more profitable for us. If *Knowledge* be deny'd us, becauſe there is danger of its *puffing us up*, and *Charity*, which is more to Edification, be planted in its ſtead, it is a Bleſſed Exchange, and God hath only made a better choice for us. But beſides, As God does not require all Virtues from Each man, ſo neither does he expect the ſame Degrees of the ſame Virtues from Every Man. In a Word; He will call no Man to Account for more than he was enabled to perform. If We do our parts, our Faith, and our Integrity ſhall be approved; and if we want not Honeſty, and Endeavour, the want of Succeſs ſhall never be imputed to us. It will not call our Salvation into hazard in the Day of Judgment, and therefore it ſhould not diſquiet us in the Day of Tryal.

And thus I have done with thoſe Scruples, which are wont to riſe from the

the Failings we feel or fancy in our ſelves. Thoſe that proceed from the expectation of ſuch eaſy and peaceful Reſentments of Mind, as are imagined always to attend Piety and true Faith, ſhall be conſidered (God willing) in another Diſcourſe.

S ER-

SERMON XIII.

THE CASE OF A Weak and Imperfect FAITH.

The Scruples about it consider'd.

St. Mark IX. 24. Latter part.

Lord I believe, help thou my Unbelief.

MY design from these Words, was to treat of a Weak and Imperfect Faith and, in pursuance of that Design, I have already assign-

assigned some Reasons for the weakness of Faith, such, and so general, that all People will find themselves more or less concerned in them; which was my First Head.

My *Second* proposed to satisfy the Scruples of many well-meaning Persons upon this occasion; by shewing, that those things which are frequently suspected, as signs of their having no True Faith, are really not so. Now, These being of Two sorts, Some, that proceed from a sight or an imagination of some Failings in Men's own selves; and Others, from the want of such easiness and peace of mind, as are supposed constantly to attend true Piety and Faith; The Former of these Kinds have been already consider'd particularly, and the Latter come now under our Examination, *viz.* Those Dissatisfactions, which are apt to arise from the want of such easy and peaceful Resentments of Mind, as true Faith, and that Piety which God accepts, are always supposed to produce.

Now of These I commonly meet with Two, which seem most to deserve our Consideration, And they are,

First, Mens doubting of their particular Election and Salvation; and *Secondly*, The want of those inward Joys, and that present constant peace of heart, which Religion is so often said in Scripture to cheer our Spirits with, and to recommend it self to us by.

First then, I shall endeavour to satisfy you, that for Men to *doubt of their own particular Election and Salvation* (as that Phrase is commonly used) *is not any Argument, that they want true Faith.* Nor indeed could it ever have been thought one, if a sort of Vain Men had not led their Followers away, with a strange deluding imagination, that it was One necessary part and Character of a true Belief in Christ, to perswade themselves of their own personal Election, and that it was impossible they should ever miscarry; So that not to rest assured of their own Eternal Salvation, is, (as they represent the matter) a Distrust of Christ's mercy, and of the Faithfulness of God to his promises, since *his gifts, and his calling are without Repentance, and whom he once loveth, he loveth them unto the end.*

Now

Now when people are told in so very confident and peremptory terms, that This is the Faith, by which they must be saved, and, that to question their own Eternal Happiness, is an undeniable proof, that no such thing belongs to them; And, when at the same time upon examination of their own breasts, and an humble sight of their many Failings and Infirmities, they cannot rest in all that fulness of assurance, but find some little Misgivings and Fears mixed with their Hopes; We are not to wonder, if they lye under sad anxieties, and dissatisfactions, so long as they believe themselves wanting in a Condition, absolutely necessary to Salvation; But Such is not this positive Assurance, whatever is pretended; nor in truth can it be; as I hope to convince you in few words, and, by so doing, most effectually to put an End to all those Scruples and Disquiets, that are owing merely to this false presumption of its being so, and, that there can be no true Faith without it.

To believe, that God out of a gracious design to save Mankind from

Hell and everlasting Destruction, sent his Son into the World to dye for them; And, that All such as Believe and obey the Gospel, shall most certainly, by His merits, have their Obedience accepted, and their Souls made eternally happy; This indeed is a true, and a necessary Belief; And to question This, is to distrust and dishonour God; It is to contradict his word, and to blaspheme his Truth. But for You, or Me in particular, to believe that We are of this happy number, This can never be required of us, as a positive Duty. Nor hath the Gospel enjoin'd it, any farther than, by the Testimony of our own Consciences, and the word of God, we find our selves within those General terms, by which the Gospel promises Salvation to Mankind at large. And you will, I think, agree, that, even in very Good men, it cannot be expected This should amount to a positive assurance, when you have considered the following Arguments.

As *First*, It is not possible, I conceive, *to reconcile such an absolute assurance with Fear.* And yet the Gospel plainly pro-

propounds this as a proper, and very powerful motive to a Christian's Obedience, For however that may have been run down, as a Spirit contrary to the Genius of the New Covenant, and the New Creature; yet it is not plainer, that the Old Testament places the * beginning of Religious Wisdom in the Fear of the Lord, than it is, that the New attributes the very finishing and Excellence of it to the same Affection of mind; and makes the very Mercies of God in Christ a foundation for it. For so St. *Paul* advises the *Corinthians*, (2 Ep. Chap. VII. v. 1.) *Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.* Where, it is plain, he spoke not to Novices, or to such as were to make their first feeble Essays by the help of this, and then pass on to some Nobler Motive; but he expects that they should complete their Duty, and become perfect by That. A Vertue so far from being inconsistent with Gospel-mercies, that they are exhorted to fear for that reason, because they had such gracious promises to depend upon.

* Psal. cxi. 10.

* Phil. II. 12, 13.

on. The same Apostle commands his *Philippians*, * *to work out their Salvation with fear and trembling*; that is, in an awe of God's Justice constantly upon their minds; a constant Dread of his Vengeance, and from thence an Anxious Care to please him. And yet all this is not a Spirit of Bondage; for That could not stand with having received the Spirit of Adoption; as these *Philippians* had; who are accordingly encouraged to this diligence in the next verse, from the consideration of God's Grace, whereby he works in men *both to will and to do, of his good pleasure*. Nor may we say, (as some fondly do) that the Love of God is cooled by such a principle, since our Blessed Saviour himself hath recommended the highest Act of Love, that men are capable of, no less than suffering Martyrdom it self, and laying down our lives for his sake, from the same motive. Thus he hath chosen to do to his beloved ones, (*Luke* XII. 4, 5.) *I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the Body, and after that have no more that they can do; But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath*

* Phil. II. 12, 13.

hath power to cast into hell, yea I say unto you, fear him. How often are we called upon * *Take heed lest we depart from God*, Not to be † *high-minded, but to fear*, lest the branches of the Olive be cut off, after they have been grafted in, and others be taken in their stead; and to beware of temptation, lest he ‖ *who thinketh he standeth*, and trusts too much to his own bottom, *happen at last to fall.* Now if any Man can discern, how such a Fear as this can agree with a full and undoubted persuasion of ones own particular Election and Salvation, then he may allow every Misgiving of this kind to be a Want of Faith. But, if being afraid, and being certain of the self same thing, at the same time; If trembling for fear we should miscarry and offend, and knowing that we cannot possibly miscarry; If taking heed lest we fall, and yet being obliged to believe that God can as soon cease to stand as We; If these things I say, be not Contradictions to all Experience and Common Sense; I must own I do not know any thing that is. And then it follows, that the Gospel, which commands such an awful dread

* Heb. III. 12. † Rom. XI. 20. ‖ 1 Cor. X. 12.

of God, and fear of our own Safety as we have seen; cannot command such an assurance, as is inconsistent with that fear, and must needs destroy it. Consequently then those doubts, which prove the want of such an absolute assurance, do not prove, that the Person who labours under them, wants true Faith, or any qualification requisite for a Christian Life here, and Heaven hereafter.

Let it be considered, *Secondly*, That Such a positive Perswasion as This cannot be required as a necessary act of saving Faith, because the *Promises of Salvation are themselves Conditional, and one of those Conditions is Perseverance.* The marks, which St. *John* hath given to judge our State by, are such as these, * *He that hath this hope in himself*, (that is, the hope of seeing God as he is, and enjoying his blessed presence for ever in Heaven) *purifieth himself, even as he is pure.* † *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil, He that doth not righteousness is not of God.* And the same Apostle declares in the *First* of that Epistle, that though he wrote

* 1 John III. 3.

† 1 John III. 10.

to

to them on purpose that * *their joy might be full*, yet all the comfort he could give them was this, that *if we say we have fellowship with him*, (i. e.) *with God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and walk in darkness, we lye, and do not the truth.* Our Life, we know, is a Condition of Discipline and Tryal; and what Difficulties and Temptations may still await us none of us all can tell. A good man may look back upon that part already spent with great Comfort, and a Holy Trust; But when the Best of Men look forward, all they can do, is only to hope well, and resolve well, for the time to come. And alas! How many of our most likely Hopes have been defeated? How many of the Purposes, which we made in the Sincerity of our hearts have been broken and baffled heretofore? And can we then be certain, where all we can do is to pray, and to intend, and to endeavour well; that is, to do again, what we have done perhaps a thousand times already, without Success? If our Resolutions indeed be stedfast, if our good Intentions be accomplish'd, upon this Condition we are infallibly sure; But

* 1 John I. 4, 6.

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can we be infallibly ſure of the Condition it ſelf? Dare we depend upon our own hearts, which we have found treacherous ſo often before? and not doubt our frail nature, or remember our many infirmities? This ſure, were ſtrange Stupidity, ſtrange Confidence, ſtrange Forgetfulneſs. In a word, Undoubting aſſurance is only for Them that have finiſhed their warfare, and come to receive their Crown. But in thoſe who are ſtill in heat of action, and have many ſharp conflicts yet to undergo, many difficult Paſſes, and Ambuſhes to fight their way thro', it is too great a boldneſs, too great a folly, to ſing Songs of Triumph to themſelves, before the danger of the Day be over. It is encouragement enough to ſtrive lawfully, that in God's due time we ſhall be ſure * *to reap, if we faint not.* And if ſome fears of looſing the Prize, be mingled with our Hopes, theſe will but quicken our Care the more. But He that demands to have his Wages made over to him irrevocably, before his Services have given him a Title to them, is an Inſolent Servant. He, it is to be ſuſpected, does not ask a Security, to ſup-

†Gal. VI. 9.

port

port him in the Hardships of his Duty, but rather to indulge Carelesness, and cherish Presumption.

But to silence all Scruples in one Word I observe, *Thirdly*, That such an assurance as we have been treating of, *not only is not*, but that it *cannot possibly be*, *that Necessary Christian Faith commanded in the Gospel.* For we are told, times without number, that *by Faith we are saved*, and consequently whatever Faith is, till we have it, we cannot be in a Condition of being saved. But now, if this Faith consist in a peremptory perswasion and full assurance of our own personal Salvation, then it follows, that we must believe, and be assured, that we are in a State of Salvation, before we are really so. Now this is manifestly absurd, and makes what such Men call *Faith*, to be in Effect no other than Ignorance, and Presumption. And, on the other hand, if a thing must actually be, before we can be assured that it is; then we must be in a State of Salvation before we can be assured that we are so; and consequently That Faith, which puts

us

us into that State, cannot be a full and undoubted perſwaſion of our being in it already. And then, I am ſure, there is no reaſon to diſquiet our minds for any ſuch Doubts or Miſgivings, as proceed not from any diſtruſt of God, but of our ſelves; ſuch as fear always, becauſe they always dread an angry juſtice, and the danger of offending a good and a Holy God. Theſe Doubts may argue Modeſty, and Humility, but are by no means to be lookt upon as a conſtant mark of Infidelity, or ſuch a Defect in Faith, as ſhould endanger our Souls, or give them any diſturbance with regard to their Condition in the next World, merely upon this Account.

There remains yet One Objection more to be ſatisfied, which Men are apt ſometimes to make againſt the reality of their own Faith; and This is derived from *the want of thoſe inward Joys, and that preſent peace of heart, which a true Piety, ſuch as God accepts, and approves, is ſuppoſed always to produce in the Breaſt of every ſincere Believer.*

Among

Among the many Excellent Motives, whereby it hath pleaſed God to invite us to a good Life, None, which concern our preſent happineſs, is more engaging, than that Tranquility of Mind, and thoſe ſweet Overflowings of Pleaſure, which the ſenſe of God's Favour, and the grateful remembrances of having done well, entertain Good Men withal. And, beſides, the particular Ordinances of God to reward his Servants with theſe preſent Satisfactions, there is ſomewhat in the very nature of the thing, ſo agreeable, ſo conſtant a reliſh of Virtue, to ſoften the difficulties of it, that a man may well be tempted to ſuſpect himſelf, when he reaps no ſenſible delight from his endeavours to act worthily. But yet ſometimes ſo it happens, that this Joy is either withheld, or the ſenſe of it intercepted, and yet no uncomfortable Concluſions, how colourable ſoever, can with certainty be gathered to our prejudice, and that particularly upon theſe following Accounts.

Firſt, Though this pleaſure of Mind, be a *Common*, and moſt *uſual*, yet

yet it is not a *necessary* and *inseparable* Attendant upon well-doing. We find therefore St. *Paul* praying for the *Romans*, that *God would fill them with all Joy and Peace in believing*, which shews plainly, that these are Gifts and Graces, by which God encourages his Servants, and renders their Duty easy to them; But, had these been absolutely inherent in Faith, it had been a very vain thing to have prayed for them; for then they must have enjoyed those Blessings, from the moment of their embracing the Faith, and in proportion to their Zeal in assenting and living up to it. * And how odd had it been to beg, that They *might have joy and peace in believing*, when at this rate they could not possibly believe, but they must have Joy and Peace?

*Rom. XV. 13.

And therefore, when we see such things made the Subject of a Petition to God, we may be sure, they are not any necessary ingredient of Faith, but something additional and accidental to it, which may be withheld, or may be granted, at God's good pleasure; and without which the Virtue itself

itſelf may ſubſiſt, and continue entire.

Secondly, Theſe Comforts God ſometimes does actually withhold, for our greater advantage. How frequent are the Complaints in Scripture of God's hiding his Face from his Servants? how vehement the Supplications for the light of his Countenance to ſhine out upon them? And this putting himſelf behind the Cloud, as it were, is by no means a conſtant effect of his Diſpleaſure, but a neceſſary Diſcipline and Check upon them that are left in that dark diſconſolate Condition. He knows how apt our Joys, even upon Spiritual Accounts, are to over-ſet us; how any inward Gaiety of heart ſwells and makes us giddy; And therefore theſe Dejections are of no leſs uſe to contain ſome in their Duty, than the contrary Comforts are to encourage and ſupport Others. 'Tis the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of his Providence, to keep the Sins of one Penitent, and the Image of an angry Juſtice before his Eyes, that a longer Remorſe may effectually humble him, and prevent a Relapſe; No leſs than it is

is, to ſuſtain Others by the raviſhing Ideas of his Mercy, that Theſe may cheer the faint and feeble, and reſcue them from Deſpair. He beſt knows our Tempers, and what Remedies and Diet are proper for the ſeveral ſorts of them. Thoſe, whoſe diſtreſſes require it, ſhall have *Angels Food* and *Meat enough*; Others, who are not to be truſted with ſuch delicious fare, ſhall be fed with the *Bread of Affliction*, and have *plenteouſneſs of Tears to drink*. And this ſevere diſpenſation, if rightly improved, ſo as to keep us low, and wean us from the World, and inflame our Zeal and Devotion to ſeek God's Face more earneſtly, will at laſt break forth in marvellous Joy, and, like a Cloudy Morning, burſt out into a warm and glorious Day. The Sun of Righteouſneſs will not fail in his due time to ſhed his refreſhing Beams upon our Head, and double the bleſſing, and recompence all the paſt long Night, by riſing, not with comfort only, but which is more deſirable, with *healing under his Wings*. For this *tryal of our Faith worketh patience, and if patience have her perfect work*, then (*St. James* tells us, *Jam.* I. 4.) we

ſhall

shall be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

But *Thirdly*, To speak my thoughts freely on this occasion, I am clearly of Opinion, that the most usual Cause of these Scruples is Melancholy, and a diseased Blood. When the Spirits are low and sluggish, and depress the mind, then every thing looks black, and dismal; and the distempers of the *outward* Man, are mistaken for the desertions of the *inward*. The Understanding is disturbed, and the Imagination so blotted and stained, that it makes a false *Medium*, and nothing appears in its true shape or colour. In this confusion Men are the most unqualified that can be, to make any judgment concerning the State of their own Souls. They cannot be brought to believe themselves such as they are, and they run away with strong notions of their being such as they are not. Examine what Ground they have for their lamentations, what grievous, wilful, and habitual Offences they can accuse themselves of, which should justify their Terrors, and provoke God to forsake them;

yet ſtill, though their Conſciences condemn them not, all comes to one, and loſt they are ſure they are: Though Others, who ſee their Condition without prejudice, and weigh it impartially, are aſſured both from Scripture and Reaſon, that it is not, cannot be ſo with them. So impoſſible is it ſometimes for a Man to know himſelf, and ſo exceeding deaf does this unhappy Complexion render Men, not only to all Comfort, but to all manner of Reaſon and Argument. And, which is yet worſe, Religion it ſelf ſuffers by this means, and the Reputation of its Joys and ſecret Complacencies is ſeverely reflected upon by the Ignorant; (though moſt unjuſtly) when We, who are Miniſters of the Goſpel, do not remove theſe diſmal Agonies. Whereas, in truth, they are no part of Our Buſineſs, but require Phyſicians of another Kind: and that which commonly paſſes for Trouble of Mind, and a wounded Conſcience, is no Malady of the Mind at all, nor capable of being cured by all the *Balm in the Spiritual Gilead*; but purely a Bodily Diſtemper, and only to be compoſed by Bodily Applications.

So

So that, *Fourthly*, For the Vindication of God's Truth, we must observe; That these Promises of inward Content and Satisfaction to Good Men, are to be understood, as all those other Promises of *Long Life*, and *Health*, and *Riches*, and *Prosperous Success*, and every Temporal Blessing: That is, So as to be true for the most part, and except some better thing be given in their stead: But not so universally true, as to admit of no extraordinary and reserved Cases; nor to oblige God never to send Trouble of Mind, or any other Afflictions, upon his best and most beloved Servants, when he sees this most expedient; Profitable for the Tryal and Increase of their Vertue and Patience, or any otherwise more for the Eternal Good of their Souls.

Thus it appears evidently, That, the Joy of Well-Doing does not always accompany the Action it self. Sometimes it is separated from it by God, who sends this Anguish and Tribulation of Spirit, and consults our Advantage by these unpleasant Methods; And sometimes an unhappy Constitution sheds its Venom upon the

Mind, and imbitters all its Reflections upon it self: But, however that be, since the Pleasures and charming Satisfactions of Holiness may be sometimes missing; And since these Ways there are, at least, of taking them from us, the Consequence is undeniable to my present Purpose, *viz.* That *those inward Disquiets ought not to drive us to any distrust of Mercy, or Despondency of our own Eternal Welfare.* That Comfort and Safety do not always dwell together; and we argue wrong, if we make *the Want of Peace and Joy in believing*, a Proof of our *not believing at all.*

III. And now at length I am come to my *Third* and *Last* Thing proposed from the Text, which is, *To lay down some Rules, whereby the Weakness of Faith may be distinguished from the Want of it*; and, how any Man, by examining his own Conscience, may discern whether his imperfect Belief be consistent with the Terms of Salvation or not.

The Necessity of having some such distinguishing Characters is very great, because what I have said upon the Former

Former Particulars is only designed to prove, That the Imperfections of our Faith are not always our Faults, but now and then our Misfortunes. This was a Support due to the Integrity and honest Endeavours of some Melancholy good Persons. But, when I urge thus much on Their Behalf, my Meaning is not, to encourage Others in their Security, who ought to be dejected, and yet are not. Some Cases give Men unnecessary Trouble, and scare them with imaginary Dangers: Others carry just Fear in them, and open all Hell, to Men so stupid and blind, that that they cannot, or will not see it. So that it is of mighty Consequence, to open the Eyes of both Those sorts of Persons; and to set each of their Circumstances in a true Light, that the One may be awakened from his frightful Dream, the Other from his pleasant deluding One; The Sorrowful rejoice in the vanishing of his Sorrows, and the Sinner have no less Cause to do so, in the timely Sight of his Misery, and happy Care to prevent it.

This were a Work well deserving a larger and more particular treating, than I am now able to allow it; but

however, some few General Observations carefully applied, and compared with what hath been said on the Two former Heads, will be a sufficient Direction to us in this Affair.

First, Such Imperfections in our Faith are very agreeable with our Safety, *as we our selves have not voluntarily contributed to.* There is, as I said formerly, a Defect in Believing, which proceeds from the Mysterious Nature of the Doctrines propounded to us, and the Shortness of our Understandings, which are not large enough to comprehend them. And this is such a Defect, as Nature and not We are accountable for. But there is also Another, which Men make this only a Pretence for, and That is wholly their Own. For, though we are not able to conceive every Article of the Christian Religion distinctly, and to render a Reason of every Nicety that captious Disputers may load it with; yet, unless there be some Unfair Dealing, of which we are Guilty to the blinding of our own Eyes, there is enough to be discovered for the Conviction of our Judgment, and bringing us into the Obedience of Faith.

Faith. Now indeed, if we first consult Flesh and Blood, and take a prejudice to Religion, because it abridges us of some Pleasures, and claps a severe Restraint upon some Appetites, and expects that Humane Discourse should submit to Divine Revelation; Upon These Terms, the Success of our Study in it is not like to be very great. But then the Disappointment is entirely from our selves. For, when Men thus possest pretend to examine, and give off dissatisfied, it is because their Minds are bribed and byassed against the Cause they undertake to judge. Almighty God does indeed declare Truths of a more elevated kind; but the Principles he requires us to proceed upon are the same: And he gives Men leave to use all Arguments, that they think reasonable in other Cases, provided they will but yield their Assent upon equal Terms. But if a Man resolve beforehand, not to allow, that God can be Wiser, or Greater than himself; if no Authority shall suffice to prove, that any thing above the reach of his own Reason ever came from Heaven, but all Mankind shall be esteemed Lyars, rather than that

Idol within his own Brain; if he discern beforehand, what Engagements these Doctrines, when allowed, draw him into; and cannot away with the Absurdity of a Practice contradicting his Profession; and upon that Account will not enslave himself, nor tye up his own Hands; This alters the Case extreamly; These are not Difficulties of Nature's but our Own making. God will vindicate his Institution and his Truth, in severe Vengeance upon such perverse Wretches, and make a just Difference between those that doubt, because it is impossible for them to know perfectly; and them that dispute and oppose, because they are loth to find the Truth; slack to consider, and unwilling to believe.

Secondly, Another very distinguishing Character of this imperfect Faith, whether it be agreeable to the Terms of Salvation or not, is *the Humility, or the Pride of the Man's Heart.* For, where a Person is modest, and thinks meanly of himself, he will see, and bewail, and diligently endeavour to redress, the Grievances and Infirmities of his own Mind. His Ears will be open to Instruction and Reproof; his Under-

Understanding will not disdain to captivate it self to the Wisdom of God, nor blaspheme and rally the Inspirations of the Holy Ghost, nor arraign all sober Christians of Credulity and Madness, for submitting to a Voice from Heaven, the Testimony of Miracles, and the united Consent of the Church in all Ages. He studies the Scriptures reverently; confirms himself in what Reason may attain to, and what it cannot, he silently adores; His Ignorance is not wilful and affected, but he is ever desirous of better Information; and, in the mean while, submits quietly to the Determination of his Superiors, in disputed Points, rather than he will disturb the Peace and Order of the Church, for the sake of Contradiction, or the Itch of advancing any particular Conceit of his own. Such a Temper as This is highly necessary and commendable, where no Man can know every Point of Religion perfectly, and but very Few have Advantages of examining nicely all that may be known. Now an Humble Spirit makes the best amends for such Disabilities in Speculation; And indeed, for all the Defects in Practice.

Because

Because it keeps Men sensible of their Diseases and Wants, and best qualified to receive a Cure for them. Whereas Pride, on the Contrary, not only makes Men Fools, but keeps them so. It fills them full of themselves alone, and never looks, but through the Magnifying part of the Perspective. It renders them deaf to all manner of Admonition, because it never suffers them to suppose they want any; And, instead of growing wiser and better, they are only exasperated, and hardened the more in their Folly. In short, take Faith in its utmost Latitude, and you will find, in every Instance, the same Event with that which our Saviour hath described in the Parable * of the Pharisee and the Publican. He that descends into his own Breast, and sadly reflects on his Unworthiness and Deficiencies; that laments, and condemns himself with a *God be merciful to me a Sinner*, or, as in the Text, cries out with Tears, *Lord help my Unbelief*, is likely enough to go down to his House justified. † *The Meek will God guide in Judgment, and the Humble will he teach his Way.* But when once a Man is come to a *God I thank*

* Luke 18. 9.

† Psal. 25. 9.

thank thee, that I am not as Other Men are; when he is blind to his Own Failings, and rips up those of Others, to shelter, and excuse his Own; This Man's Unbelief is not through Weakness, but through Perverseness and Choice. He continues ignorant and wicked, because he will not learn; And there is no Remedy, but continue so he must; because he thinks himself too wise and too good to be taught, and admonished. His desperate Condition is well observed by *Solomon*, * *Seest thou a Man wise* (he might have said, holy too) *in his own conceit, there is more hope* of a Fool, or of a profligate Sinner, *than of him.* The One labours under a more raging and a more scandalous Distemper indeed; but the Other is poison'd secretly, and so fond of his Disease, that he hates his Antidote, and obstructs all the Methods of Recovery.

* Prov. 26. 12.

But *Thirdly*, The Weakness of Faith, and Defects in Practice are known to be consistent with Safety, or otherwise, *by the Use or the Neglect of proper Means to strengthen it.* For it is not enough, that we have not wilfully contributed to our past Failings

ings, nor yet that we lament or are seriously concerned for our *present*, unless to both these we add Vigilance and care, to prevent those that we are subject to, for the *future*. He that feels himself perplexed with Doubts and Difficulties in Religion, must *ask Wisdom of God*, and labour after it with Meekness and Diligence. He that finds his Faith weak in influencing his Practice, must take all Opportunities of fastening good Principles on his Mind; and continually quicken and rouse himself up by Holy Motions and Remembrances; and drive the Impressions deeper, that they may be ever present, and ever vigorous, to draw out into use, and ward off every Temptation that besets him. The Man that languishes in his Devotion, must raise and inflame his Zeal, by all necessary Preparations to Prayer; by sequestring himself from Business and Care, as much as Conveniently he may; fixing his Mind with Reverent Apprehensions of the Majesty he kneels before, and the infinite Importance of the Blessings he prays for. He that repents, and thinks his Regret for past Offences less afflicting than it ought,

must

muſt work himſelf into as deep Remorſe as poſſibly he can; And expreſs his Sincerity and the Senſe of his Soul, by ſorrowing in Proportion for his Sin, as Nature determines him to do upon Other Occaſions of Grief and Sadneſs: And ſo of the Reſt of the Caſes mentioned heretofore. For, tho' God make Allowances for Nature and unavoidable Infirmities; yet he expects we ſhould not improve theſe into Wilful Tranſgreſſions and Habits of Vice. But on the contrary, that we withſtand and ſtrive againſt them; and proceed as far as we can, toward the correcting and curing of them. He does not expect, that every Man ſhould be equally Knowing, or equally Conſiderate, or equally Devout, or Contrite; But he requires, that Every one ſhould know as much as he can, and make his Belief as practical and effectual as he can, and Pray as fervently, and do Good as delightfully, and Mourn for his Wickedneſs as affectionately, as he is able. For, This is the only Mark of our Integrity, and that which will take off all the Miſchief of corrupt Nature, not to make our Misfortunes a Pretence for real Faults,

Faults; nor, from the neceſſary Imperfections to which we all are liable, to take occaſion of Tranſgreſſing perverſely, and covering our own Careleſneſs and wilful Neglects.

And to all theſe things we muſt add a *Fourth* Sign, which is, *Frequent and earneſt Applications for Strength and Grace, to Him who is able to ſupport and perfect us.* To our Lord therefore we ſhould come; And, if we be Sincere, we ſhall come (like Him in the Text) with ſtrong Cries, and vehement Contention of Heart and Voice. We ſhall beg his Aſſiſtance againſt our Failings, and his Comforts againſt our Sorrows and ſad Miſgivings of Heart; that he would protect us in our Dangers and Temptations, and give us a right Judgment of his Dealings with us; that he would ſcatter our Doubts and Diſtractions; and diſpell thoſe Clouds, which intercept the joyful Light of his Countenance from us. And in all theſe, and in all other Inſtances of a weak Faith, *Lord, we believe* thou canſt, and therefore we pray, that thou of thy Goodneſs wilt *help our Unbelief*; ſtabliſh, ſtrengthen, ſettle

settle us in thy Truth: Yea, *We beseech thee good Lord, that it may please thee to strengthen such as do stand, and to comfort and help the Weak-hearted, and to raise up them that fall, and finally to beat down Satan under our Feet.* Amen.

SER-

SERMON XV.

CHRIST's RESIGNATION TO HIS *Father's Will.*

St. LUKE XXII. 42.

Father, If thou be Willing, remove this Cup from me; nevertheleſs, not My Will, but Thine be done.

THE ſeveral Circumſtances of our Bleſſed Saviour's Paſſion are related by the Evangeliſts, in ſo particular, ſo moving a Manner, as muſt needs argue thoſe Men

Men extreamly ſtupid and inſenſible, upon whom they do not make a very lively and vigorous Impreſſion. Now the Purpoſes this Account is deſign'd to ſerve, are principally theſe Two; To excite our Thankfulneſs and Love, to Him who ſubmitted to undergo ſuch bitter things for us; And to work us up to an irreconcilable Averſion againſt Sin, the wretched Cauſe of all his Sufferings. And, What can kindle our Love, and enflame our Hearts with Zeal and Gratitude, if the Contemplation of his Agonies and Pains, the Tortures of his Body, and the Amazement, and exceeding Sorrows of his Soul will not, to which he voluntarily expoſed himſelf, by accepting the Puniſhment of our Offences? What can preſent us with a more frightful Image of the Wrath of God, and the Horrors of a ſelf-condemning Conſcience, than thoſe Sweats of Blood, that Heavineſs even unto Death, which this Tragical Scene in the Garden ſets before our Eyes? How ſhall wicked Sinners bear the Fury of an incenſed God, ſmoaking in Vengeance againſt them, when the Heat of it was ſo violent againſt his own

most innocent and dearly beloved Son, sustaining the Representation only, of Sinners, but who himself had never done any Sin? How exquisite must be the Amazement, how darting and raging the Pangs of Offences unpardoned; when He, whose Mind had nothing to reproach him with, trembled and sunk under the Apprehensions of that Wrath, which Others had provoked? How insupportable must be that Load of Terror and Anguish? How direful and dismal that Oppression of Spirit, which wicked Men draw down upon their own Heads; when He, who in Kindness took the Burden, which himself had in no degree deserved, yet was almost crushed with the mighty Weight; and with most vehement Importunity desired, if it were possible, a Release from the approaching Misery? For so he manifestly does, in those Words now propounded to your Consideration. He withdrew from his Disciples, he poured out his Soul to God, he shewed him of his Terror and Trouble, and kneeling down, with all possible Submission, with the utmost Earnestness humane Nature was capable of, with

from all

all that even this present, this unparallel'd Affliction could inspire, he prayed, saying, *Father, if thou be Willing, remove this Cup from me; nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.*

In speaking to this Text, I am not very sollicitous to compare and reconcile it with those differing Forms of Expression, which the other Gospels have given us in this Matter. All that is necessary of that Kind, will fall in occasionally, under some or other Head of my Discourse. And That can be but little, since the Substance of this Prayer is the same, in all the Evangelists. And any of the Terms, they have left it us in, will be equally serviceable to the Use I intend to make of it.

Now that is Two-fold:

I. *First*, I shall lay before you some Considerations relating to the Prayer it self, and the Circumstances of our Blessed Lord, who made it.

II. *Secondly*, I shall observe something from hence, which may be applicable and useful to the Case of Christians in general.

I. I begin with ſome Conſiderations, relating to the Prayer it ſelf, and the Circumſtances of our bleſſed Maſter which put him upon it. And I think there are Four, which may very well deſerve our Notice.

1. *Firſt*, The Compellation, or Manner of Addreſs, in that firſt Word, *Father*.

2. *Secondly*, The Subject Matter of his Petition, *Remove this Cup from me*.

3. *Thirdly*, The Reſervation, with which that requeſt is preferred. *If thou be willing*, &c.

4. *Fourthly*, The free and entire Reſignation of himſelf to God's Diſpoſal, in caſe his Wiſdom ſhould ſee fit not to grant this Requeſt; *Nevertheleſs, not My Will, but Thine be done.*

1. *Firſt*, Here is the Compellation, or Manner of Addreſs, *Father*; *O my Father*, as † St. *Matthew*; *Abba, Father*, * St. *Mark*; Which Exclamation in the One, and the Doubling of the Word in the Other, add nothing to St. *Luke*'s Senſe; but only import the Vehemence and Affectionate Application of the Speaker. In our Lord's

† Matth. 26. 39.
* Mark 14. 36.

Lord's last dying Agonies upon the Cross, we find him calling for Help under another Title; * *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* A Title denoting the unbounded Power of God; and proper for such Extremity of Sufferings, as nothing less than Omnipotence could be a sufficient Succour for. But here, before Matters were come to that Extremity, and, when the Design of his Supplication was rather for Prevention of an approaching Calamity, than for a rescue out of Miseries, which had almost overwhelm'd and swallow'd him up, the Character of *Father* is made choice of, as more agreeable to his Purpose. For This implyed the Duty of a Son, and that ready Obedience, of which he was now about to give the last, the most convincing, the best becoming Proof. This argued the Tenderness of that Relation; Those Bowels, so apt to relent in all the Sufferings of Them, who derive their Nature and Being from us, and are a part of our own Flesh and Substance. That entire Affection, which even the Brutishest of Men cannot but feel, and the Best of Men find greater than can

* Matth. 27. 46.

be expreſt. Much therefore need not be ſaid to incline a *Father's* Pity, who in himſelf is ſo diſpoſed to compaſſionate the Afflictions of a good Child, that it can hardly be imagined, he ſhould lay more upon ſuch a one, than is abſolutely neceſſary to be endur'd; Or, that even Thus much ſhould be impoſed, without wiſe and forcible Reaſons, and great degrees of Reluctancy, and a Violence upon himſelf. To all which if we add, that the tendereſt Reſentments of Earthly Parents are but a very feeble Image of the Love this Eternal Father bears to this Only, this Eternal Son; there needs no more to ſatisfy us, how ſignificant this Endearing Term was in our Saviour's Circumſtances; and that, if Any Conſideration could, this of God's being his *Father*, (ſuch a Father of ſuch a Son) muſt have prevailed, for the obtaining his Petition. And what that was I come now to conſider.

2. *Secondly*, As it is contained in that Clauſe, *Remove this Cup*, or (as another Evangeliſt hath it) * *Let this Cup paſs from me.*

* Matth. 26. 39.

I

I cannot think there is any Occaſion to ſpend Time, either in explaining this Metaphor, or enlarging upon the Reaſon of it. Scarce any Figure is more frequent in Scripture-Language, than that of a Man's *Cup* being put for his Portion, either of Proſperity, or Adverſity. To this Purpoſe we read of God's being the Good Man's * *Cup*, and making *his Cup to overflow*, when the Bleſſings and Comforts of Piety and Vertue are deſcribed. And ſo likewiſe of a ‖ *Cup of Trembling* and *Aſtoniſhment*, of *Red Wine* and *Bitter Dregs*; when Miſery and ſevere Vengeance are denounced againſt bold and impenitent Sinners, whom God hath marked out for exemplary Puniſhment, or utter Deſtruction. As little Reaſon is there to vindicate this Paſſage, from that very foreign and ſtrained Interpretation, which Some have endeavoured to put upon it; As if Chriſt here did deprecate, not any Calamity that threatned his own Perſon, but ſuch ſore Tryals as his Servants and ſuffering Members might afterwards be expoſed to, for the ſake of God and their Duty. For, ſetting aſide other Arguments, our

* Pſal. 16, 6. and 23. 5.

‖ Pſal. 75. 9.

Lord's own Words are a sufficient Guide to us in this Matter. He, when rebuking St. *Peter*'s forward Zeal to rescue him from those Officers, who came to apprehend him, does it in these Terms, * *Put up thy Sword into the Sheath, the Cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?* Now what Cup could it be, that St. *Peter* endeavoured to prevent his Master's drinking, but those Sufferings, and that Death, which the *Jews* intended to bring upon him? And therefore we have all the Reason in the World to believe, that the same Sufferings and Death are meant by *the Cup*, he begs his Father to remove in the Text; Which yet, upon mature Conviction, that his Father did not think fit to remove, he settles himself presently afterwards to drink, with full Resolution and Contentment. The Only Argument, which prevailed with some Interpreters to seek out any other Construction for these Words, seems to have been an Imagination, that the betraying any degree of Fear or Unwillingness to dye in that cruel and ignominious Manner, was a Weakness unworthy of our Blessed Saviour, and incon-

* John 18. 11.

inconſiſtent with his Deſign of coming into the World. The Force of which Pretence I ſhall be led to examine under my Next Particular. In the mean while, taking it for granted, that his approaching Paſſion and Death are the Calamities, which he begs here to be delivered from; I proceed to obſerve in the

3. *Third* Place, *With what Reſervation, he prefers this Petition to his Father*, expreſt in thoſe Words, *If thou be willing; Father, if thou be willing, remove this Cup from me:* Or, as it is in St. *Matthew*, * *O my Father, if it be poſſible, let this Cup paſs from me.* By comparing which Two Paſſages together, we are led to a right Underſtanding, what ſort of Poſſibility is there intended. For, abſolutely ſpeaking, *all things are poſſible with God*, and it would ill become Us peremptorily to pronounce, that God could not remit the Sins of the World, without requiring a Satisfaction, and Equivalent Compenſation for them, by the ineſtimable Blood of his own Innocent and Divine Son. But yet, even this Aſſertion is capable of a very fair and true Senſe. For, although God, con-

* Ch. 26. 39.

considered as a Sovereign and Almighty Being, can do all things which do not imply a Contradiction; And, although Mercy be the undoubted Prerogative of a Supream Law-giver, and may be extended to Whom, and upon what Terms, he shall think fit; Yet, if we consider God, as a Wise and a Good Governor, One who is concern'd for the Honour and Observance of his Laws; and who, in the Mysterious Work of Man's Redemption, did principally design to discourage Sin and Disobedience, and to promote Holiness, and the vigorous Love and Practice of Virtue in the World: Thus it is very easy to discern, that, when he had once fixed these Rules and Measures to himself, it was not possible (according to that Scheme of Things) for this *Cup* to pass away from our Blessed Redeemer. The Reason is, because it is not possible for God, not to make choice of the Best Means, and such as may most conduce to the Wisest Purposes; Such as are most Excellent in themselves, and may be most Worthy of a Just and Good Governor. Now no Man can suppose, that Sin would have been so effectually discouraged,

raged, if the Guilt of it had been releaſed without any Conſideration at all; as it is now, by ſo ſevere and Exemplary a Vengeance, taken upon it in the Perſon of our common Repreſentative and Proxy, *Chriſt Jeſus*. God had not then ſo manifeſtly declared his Hatred and Reſentment againſt all manner of Ungodlineſs and Unrighteouſneſs of Men; as now he hath, by ſo terribly afflicting even his own Son, when he vouchſafed to ſtand in the Place, and ſuſtain the Perſon, of Sinners: He had not inſtructed us ſo fully in the Value of our Souls, had he not ſhewed us by this aſtoniſhing Inſtance, how precious a Ranſom he thought them worth purchaſing at: Nor had he bound us to the Love of Him, and that Grateful Obedience, to which all are now even * *conſtrained*, who conſider the unſpeakable Kindneſs of their God and Saviour; had he ſaved us with that which coſt him nothing; had we wanted that moſt ſenſible, that moſt powerful Engagement of not † *ſparing* his own Beloved and only Begotten Son, but *giving him up for us all*. For This hath left us utterly inexcuſable, if we do not

* 2 Cor. 5. 14.

† Rom. 8. 32.

not *live to Him*, who did not grudge *to dye for us*.

Since therefore God intended to beget in Men a due Sense, how exceeding offensive Sin was to him, and to work them up to a just Dread of the Punishment due for it; Since the Reformation of Manners, and the Love of Him and Goodness, were the Effects aimed at in this Dispensation; Since the maintaining his Laws in just Reverence and Authority, was a Design necessary, and becoming a Just and Holy Governor; And since Infinite Wisdom must needs carry on these Purposes, by Methods most suitable and congruous to them; It follows from hence, that, in some sense we may truly affirm, there was no Possibility of Christ's being excused from suffering for Sinners. *That is*, Though, in the Nature of the Thing, and with regard to God's absolute Sovereignty and Dominion, it was possible to have had the Sins of Mankind forgiven freely, and without any Atonement; yet with regard to the End and Measures, which the Wisdom of God, as a Governor of the World, and a Lawgiver to Men, had set to himself; we have

have Reaſon to think, it was not poſſible. Becauſe thoſe Ends, ſo far as can appear to Us, could not have been ſerved ſo well any other way. So that, whetherſoever of the Two Phraſes we take in this Prayer, *If it be poſſible*, or, *If thou be willing*, the Senſe comes all to one. And by imploring, that this Cup might be taken away, *if it were poſſible*, our Saviour means ſuch a Poſſibility as is Conditional, and depends upon the Will and Wiſdom of God. And ſince the Determinations of the Divine Will are not like thoſe of Ours, taken up in Humour, or Paſſion, or Partial Reſpects, but conſtantly the Reſult of mature, and ſteddy, and unerring Wiſdom: Therefore the Importance of our Saviour's Requeſt, does, in Effect, come to thus much: That, if God ſaw any other Method of bringing about this great Work, which might be of equal Efficacy, with that of his enduring thoſe bitter Things, which were now approaching towards him; he would, in tenderneſs to His own Son, make uſe of That rather; and ſpare him all that Agony and Torture, that Shame and Cruelty, All the

the intolerable, the unconceivable Anguish of Body and Mind, which, by his condescending to bear the Burden of his Father's Wrath due to sinful Men, was even then already let loose, and begun to be executed upon him.

Now here it will be seasonable to observe the true Reason of our Blessed Lord's addressing to his Father, as we see he does upon this Occasion. For it may be objected, 'Was it possible, 'that our Saviour should be ignorant 'what God had decreed to be done in 'this Matter? Does he not declare, 'that for * *that Cause he came to that* 'Hour, that he might glorify his Father by suffering? Did he not in a 'very solemn and severe Manner reprove St. *Peter*, for supposing, that 'those Sufferings should not happen 'to him? Are not the Merits of those 'Sufferings to be measnred by the 'Constancy and Chearfulness, with 'which they were undergone? And, 'since we have undoubted Testimonies of several Martyrs, who even rejoiced in their Tortures, does not 'this shrinking back, and these earnest 'Desires of escaping them, argue in 'Christ a greater Irresolution and Weakness

* John 12. 27.

'Weakneſs of Mind, than even ſome 'of his Servants diſcovered, in the 'Confirmation of that Truth, which 'they gladly Sealed with their Blood? 'He took upon him our Fleſh, and, 'in marvelous Condeſcention, came 'into the World, on purpoſe that he 'might dye for Our Benefit, and in 'Our ſtead; And is his Love now ſo 'abated, and his Reſolution ſo wa-'vering, that, when it comes to the 'Point, he ſhould decline Death; 'and, by praying to be excuſed from 'it, defeat the very end of his being 'made Mortal? Theſe are Difficulties, which, with ſome colour of Argument, may be ſtarted from the Behaviour of our Lord in his Agonies, and the Requeſt made here to his Father; And fit it is, that they ſhould be removed, and this Action ſet in its true Light; which, if I miſtake not, will effectually be done, by attending carefully to theſe following Particulars.

1. *Firſt*, In regard our Bleſſed Saviour had the Divine and Humane Nature both united in One Perſon; great Caution muſt be uſed in obſerving his Actions, that we do not miſtake, in appropriating any of them

to

to that Principle, to which they do not properly belong. For, as those Works of Wonder, which exceeded or controuled all Powers of Created Nature, must be attributed to a Principle Omnipotent and Divine; So in those Others, which relate to Subjection and Suffering, he must be understood to proceed upon a Principle purely Humane. Now praying to a Superior Being, is a Mark of Dependance and Subjection; And undergoing Pain and Death, implies Suffering: Neither of which, God, as such, is capable of. And therefore, if the Person, who was God and Man both, did Either of these; it is plain, he could do them but in One of those Capacities. The Faculties of the Divine Nature were totally suspended upon such Occasions, and He proceeded in them, not in any Degree as *God*, but entirely as a mere and real *Man*.

2. *Secondly*, The Efficacy and Mystery of Man's Redemption consisting in this Union, it was necessary, that there should be clear and undoubted Demonstration given, of the Reality of both these Natures in Christ. And this

this had not been done, unleſs, as our Lord's Miracles evidenced him to be Very God, ſo all the eſſential and inſeparable Properties and Affections of our Nature had ſo manifeſtly appeared in him, as to leave no juſt Suſpicion behind, whether he was Very Man. And, ſince the diſtinguiſhing Marks of this Nature lye principally in the Soul; it follows from thence, that ſufficient Proof of our Saviour's perfect Humanity could not be given, either by his Death, or by any Bodily Sufferings; except his Mind were beſides ſo affected with Theſe, as might convince the World, that he bore an exact Reſemblance to us, in all the Natural Paſſions and Inclinations of our Souls.

3. Now, *Thirdly*, In this Soul of Ours it is eaſy to obſerve a Two-fold Principle, which we call *Reaſon* and *Senſe*. And, without entangling our ſelves in the Subtleties of Philoſophers or Schoolmen about this Matter, Experience, (which is of more Weight than Ten thouſand nice Diſtinctions) and a little ſerious Reflection upon our Selves, will plainly convince us, that we entertain different ſorts of No-

tions, take different Measures, and aim at different Ends, as we are moved by the One, or other of these Principles. That, which we call *Sense*, catches greedily at the Present, pursues Ease, and Pleasure, and Safety; and consults the Preservation and Advantage of the Body. The Other, which we call *Reason*, enlarges our Prospect; takes into Consideration distant and future Objects; and perswades the foregoing some present Satisfactions, running some Hazards, enduring some Difficulties and Pains, for the Discharge of our Duty, and in Expectation of some greater Good in Reversion, which will make us ample amends for what we now lose or undergo upon its Account. The Former is the Principle of Animals; the Latter of Men and Christians. Under That are comprehended all our Natural Passions, which are the secret Springs that move us in all we do; under This are Understanding and Judgment, which direct, and regulate, and bound, and over-rule those Passions. But still Both these are Constituent Parts of the Humane Soul: And, to suppose a Man void

of

of Paſſions, or in no degree influenced by them, is as abſolute a *Chimera* and Contradiction in Nature, as to ſuppoſe him without Reaſon. For Theſe Two Principles are as neceſſary to make One perfect Soul, as the Rational Soul and Humane Body are to make One perfect Man. From whence we may argue,

4. *Fourthly*, That, The Weakneſs or Corruption of our Nature, as it ſtands now depraved with Sin and Luſt, does not conſiſt in being very tenderly and ſenſibly touched with Fear of *preſent Evil*, or ſtrong Inclinations to *preſent Good*, ; but in permitting thoſe Fears and Deſires to prevail, and take place, againſt the Dictates of Reaſon and Duty. Averſion to Pain, and Death, and the like, are Affections interwoven with our Original Frame and Conſtitution. *Adam* felt them in the State of Innocency. Otherwiſe, it had been vain to threaten his Tranſgreſſion with Death. For every Threatning of Puniſhment denounces ſomething terrible, ſuch as the Perſon is ſuppoſed to be under dreadful Apprehenſions of, and will think himſelf concerned to avoid.

And therefore it is no just Reflection upon the *Second Adam*, that He too felt the same Aversion to Dying, and Torment, and Shame. Infirmities indeed these Aversions may be called, in Comparison of those Perfections, which belong to God and unbodied Spirits. But then they are such Infirmities, as All who partake of Bodies must have; And, if these things had been perfectly indifferent to our Blessed Saviour, he could not have been our Saviour; that is, he could not have been a True Man.

This is, what I think, a just and faithful Account of the Matter; Much to be preferred before that Resolution, which some have given of it, as if the Vehemence of our Saviour's Passion had made him forget himself, and utter things in the Heat and Transport of his Mind, which he presently check't and corrected upon better Recollection. We indeed too often do so, but he never ceased to be Master of himself; and it seems too great a Dishonour to represent him thus rash and inconsiderate, which are the Effects of Corrupt Nature; though he thought it none to be like us, in all the inseparable

rable Frailties of our Original and real Nature.

5. Now *Fifthly*, If Christ, as Man, could not be altogether indifferent, and unconcerned, at these severe Tryals, which he already felt in part, and saw coming upon him with great Violence; Then sure it could not misbecome him to use all possible Means for declining them, and consequently not to express his Concern by praying against them, with such Reserves and Limitations, as he does here in the Text. It was no disparagement of his Love to Mankind, to detest Death and Sufferings; but in truth a higher Commendation of it; That, notwithstanding so quick a Sense, and so passionate a Regret, he offered himself to Sufferings, so ungrateful to Humane Nature in general, so exceeding harsh and bitter to Him in particular. It enhanced the Vertue of his Obedience, that he was content to give Proof of it, in so very tender and trying an Instance; and, the more vehemently he wish'd for a Release, the more Meritorious was his Submission. For God does not expect, that Men should have no unwillingness at all, to do, or to

suffer what he appoints for them; but that they should conquer their Unwillingness, and bring themselves so to acquiesce in His Choice, as to make it their Own. St. *Paul* hath truly observed, * that *no suffering for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous*; And therefore Suffering is never chosen for its own sake, but upon some other Consideration, which may over-balance the Grievousness of it. Were it Eligible in it self, there could be no Vertue in Chooſing it: For the Vertue consists in conquering and denying our selves; that we may please God. And, the stronger our own Aversions are, the more we renounce our own Wills, and the more acceptable is our Complyance with the Divine Will. All Which may give us a worthy Notion of the

* Heb. 12. 11.

4. *Fourth* and Last Thing remarkable in this Prayer, Namely, *Our Lord's free and entire Resignation of himself to his Father's Disposal, in case his Wisdom should see fit not to grant this Request.* And that is contained in the last Clause of the Verse, *Nevertheless, not My Will, but Thine be done.* And here

again

again we are assaulted with another Objection, concerning the Contrariety of Christ's *Humane Will*, by which he declined Sufferings and Death, to his *Divine Will*, which was the same with his Father's, and both accepted and decreed those Sufferings. And This, if admitted, would destroy our Saviour's Innocence, and argue him guilty of Sin. Since the very Essence and Guilt of Sin consists in a setting up our own Will, in Opposition to the Will of God concerning us. Now, though it be true, that the Blessed *Jesus*, as partaking of Two Natures, had Two distinct Wills, proper to each of them; yet is it not by any means to be allowed, that Either of These were contrary to the Other. A Diversity of Inclinations indeed there was in Him, according to the different Motions and Tendencies of the Sensitive and Rational Appetite; and This, as was explained before, is no more than Every Man feels in himself; Such particularly, as we exercise in all those, which are called *Mixt Actions*. When a Man submits to take an unpalatable Medicine, in order to his Recovery from Sickness; or cuts off a

Limb to prevent a Mortification; Nature ſtarts back, and would be gladly excuſed from ſuch ſevere Methods. But, when all Circumſtances are laid together, and we come to be thoroughly convinced of the Benefit and Neceſſity of ſuch Applications, we then prevail upon our ſelves to comply with them, and the *Rational* overcomes the *Senſitive* Principle in us. Now all this is the Act of One and the Same Will, moved by different Reſpects; and determined at laſt, by That, which, upon the whole Matter, appears the rather to be choſen; tho' at the Expence of ſome Difficulty and Trouble to us. Thus our Bleſſed Saviour, according to the Natural Principle of *Senſe*, deſired a Deliverance from his approaching Pains; but according to the Principle of *Reaſon*, which was equally natural to him as Man, he accepted thoſe Pains, and conformed his Humane to the Divine Will. But That, which clears him from all Repugnance to the Will of his Father, is, that he proceeded upon different Motives; The Natural Averſion to Suffering diſpoſed him to avoid it; but the Senſe of his Duty,

and

and the Proſpect how Neceſſary and Beneficial that Suffering would be, made him entirely ſatisfied with it, and got the better of that Averſion. And conſequently, though there was in this Action a Diverſity, yet is there no Contrariety of Wills; becauſe theſe Diſpoſitions to ſuffer, and not to ſuffer, did not proceed from the ſame Principle, nor were oppoſed in the ſame Reſpect.

The Schools have a Diſtinction, which may perhaps help to illuſtrate this Matter yet a little more fully. They tell us of a *General* and of a *Definite* or *Determinate* Will of God. All our Natural Inclinations and Averſions of what Kind ſoever, are agreeable to the *General* Will of God. For he endued us with them, and ordered all thoſe Motions, by which we feel our ſelves affected from them. But now the *Determinate* Will of God hath impoſed upon us certain Laws, and Conditions, and Reſtraints; againſt, and beyond which thoſe Inclinations muſt not be indulged in ſome particular Caſes. Now from hence it follows, that None of our Natural Inclinations and Averſions are offenſive

sive to God, or contrary to his Will, *generally speaking*, and *in their own Nature*; And that they are so Then only, when we suffer them to take Place, against his *particular* Will; which hath confined them, within some certain Rules, and upon special Emergencies. From hence it follows again; *That*, even in such Reserved Cases, These Motions are not sinful, provided we take Care to keep them within due Bounds, and in a constant Subordination to Reason and God's Commands. For the Design of Almighty God is not to extinguish our Natural Appetites, and make us cease to be Men; but to reduce those Appetites to Obedience, and so make us Good Men. And this is done effectually, when Sense is subjected to Reason, and both our Sensitive and Rational Mind are subject to the Appointments of God; notwithstanding all the Byas of Infirm Nature, which draws so strongly the other Way. And consequently the Blessed *Jesus*, in the Words now before us, did not correct any thing amisse in the former part of his Prayer. Nor was that Request of having this bitter Cup removed from him,

him, the Effect of Raſhneſs or unthinking Paſſion; But it had all the Perfection requiſite for his own unblemiſh'd Innocence, and for a Pattern to all his Followers, under any ſort of Difficulties and Tryals: Becauſe it was tempered with that no leſs eſſential Branch of the ſame Prayer; and this laſt Reſolution makes one moſt uniform Act of the ſame Humane Choice, *Neverthleſs, not My Will, but Thine be done.*

II. I now paſs to the *Second* Thing propounded from my Text, and ſhall raiſe from hence ſome Obſervations for our Practice. But theſe are ſo Plain and Obvious, that, after what hath been ſaid, I cannot; And indeed, if what hath been ſaid be duly attended to, I need not, do any more, than juſt to mention them.

1. *Firſt*, From our Saviour's uſing that Title of *Father*, in the extream Anguiſh and Bitterneſs of his Soul, We may be admoniſhed, *what Thoughts it will become us to entertain of God, in the Time of Diſtreſs and ſore Affliction.* That theſe Things ought not to diſcourage

courage us in our Duty, or abate our Love of God; or tempt us to ſuſpect, that he hath laid aſide all Care and Tenderneſs for Us. 'Tis true, Adverſity is very often a Scourge for Faults; and We, who have all of us been diſobedient Children, and have deſerved to be chaſtized, ought conſtantly to make our Amendment One happy Fruit of it. But This is not ſo ſtrictly and univerſally true, that the Proportion of any Man's Wickedneſs, or the Place he holds in God's Favour, ſhould be meaſured by the Quality or the Degree of his Sufferings. *Jeſus* the Bleſſed, was the *Lamb of God, without Blemiſh and without Spot, He never did Sin, neither was Guilt found in his Mouth*, and yet never was there any Sorrow like unto His Sorrow. He was the beſt *Beloved Son* of God, in *whom his Soul delighted* and *was well pleaſed*; and never did he delight more in Him, than at that very Inſtant, when he Sweat Drops of Blood, and poured out his Life in inexpreſſible Agonies upon the Croſs. This Example then ought to comfort and ſuſtain us under our heavieſt Preſſures; by an Aſſurance, that, how ſeverely

verely ſoever we may ſeem to be dealt with, yet the Weight of our Burden is no Argument that God hath caſt us out of his Care and Protection; that our Sorrows are capable of becoming freſh and greater Endearments, and that even in the midſt of his Correction he does not ceaſe to retain for his ſuffering Children, the Bowels of a moſt tender and affectionate Father.

2. *Secondly*, We are likewiſe taught by this Example, in *what manner we ought to addreſs to this Father for Relief.* That it is no Offence, to wiſh and pray for a Deliverance from thoſe Troubles, which it cannot be eaſy for Fleſh and Blood to undergo. He that made us, conſiders How, and Whereof we are made; and he does not expect that we ſhould attain to ſuch an Indifference, as our preſent Condition is not capable of. He allows us to decline Suffering by all Prudent and Lawful Methods; He does not require that we ſhould be inſenſible of Afflictions, when they come thick and heavy upon us. But even this tender Senſe we have of them he commands us ſo to moderate, as to leave both the

Meaſure,

Meaſure, and the Continuance of our Tryals to his Diſpoſal. We may ſhew him freely of our Trouble; We may complain of the Uneaſineſs we feel; We may propoſe our Wants and our Wiſhes; But, though we may, and ſhall do well to Propoſe them, we muſt not preſume to Preſcribe to Him. When we have expreſt our own Deſires, we muſt reſt our ſelves upon the Wiſdom and Goodneſs of this Father, not doubting, but he knows better what is fit for us, than we do how to chooſe for our ſelves; And that what he knows beſt, his Paternal Care and Prudent Affection will not fail to order, for all thoſe Children who maintain that Deference due to His Character and Theirs; and perſiſt in their Obedience, and quiet Submiſſion to whatever he ſees convenient to appoint for them.

3. *Thirdly*, This Paſſage ſhews, *what ſort of Submiſſion God requires from us, to all the ſeverer Diſpenſations of Providence.* And That is a Conforming Our Will to His. Not merely enduring what we cannot avoid, for this is a Submiſſion of Rebels and Slaves,

Slaves, of Brutes and Wild Beasts, when tyed and chained down to what they cannot run away from. We are not able to contend with God, or break loose from That, which must be endured, whether we will or no. But we must even be Willing to endure, and not have so much as the Disposition to resist. When we are satisfied that He hath determined any thing concerning us, We must prefer those Determinations before our own Desires, and make His Choice our Own. Assuring our selves, that This is best for us, and making our Wills stoop and bend to God's. And This cannot be unreasonable, when we reflect that his Proceedings are always agreeable to Equity, and Justice, and perfect Wisdom; that all His Intentions are full of Kindness; and that every Event will at last turn to our Advantage, if our selves do not obstruct the Design and good Effect of it. And, though in particular Cases, it may not be easy to discern This, or bring our selves to so resigned a Temper; yet possible it is, with the Assistance of his Grace, and strictly agreeable to that general Desire of having all things *work together for our Good.* A Good, which we never pursue so Regularly, so Effectually, as when we yield our selves up entirely to God's Disposal; and beg that not *Our* Will, but *His may be done.*

4. *Lastly,* From hence we are directed how *to judge of the Success of our Prayers.* That they are not always lost and disappointed

pointed, when the particular thing we ask is not granted; but often answered in the most beneficial Manner, when we apprehend them to be denied and utterly rejected. This Son of his Love never prayed in vain, and though his bitter Cup was not removed, yet he had an Angel sent to strengthen him, and the Fruit of his Sufferings is endless and unspeakable. And, We, in like manner, must reckon our Petitions well received, and happily returned to us; Not only when we are rescued *from* our Troubles, but when we are supported *under* them, and rewarded *for* them. In such Cases God chooses better for us, than we should have done; And, however a Release might be more grateful, and suite with our present Inclinations; yet his Methods turn to greater Account. He afflicts because it is good for us to be afflicted; and refuses only such things, as it would be unkind in him to give. And therefore, All we have to do, is to refer our selves and all our Affairs to Him; and to beg that he would * *so assist us in all our Supplications and Prayers, that we may ever be disposed to the Attainment of everlasting Salvation, and among all the Changes and Chances of this Mortal Life, may be defended by his most gracious and ready Help, through Jesus Christ our Lord.* Amen.

* Comm. Service.

F I N I S.